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THE RED RAPIER



OR,
The Sea Rover's Bride.

A Story of War on the Waves.

BY COL. PRENTISS INGRAHAM.

CHAPTER I.

A STRANGE FATALITY.

RED CLIFFS dated back to the days of the Spanish settlements along the coast of the Gulf of Mexico, and many weird legends hung about the old structure, once the home of a Spanish Don.

It was said that the Spaniard who built the home had been an ocean free-lance, who had landed from his vessel one day for a hunt in the forest, and had come upon a beautiful young girl, the daughter of a New Orleans merchant, who spent his summers with his family in a little home which they called Red Cliffs.

After his first landing at the hospitable home the Spanish sailor had been a frequent visitor, lured there by the bright eyes of the fair maiden,

"THEY HAVE KILLED MY BOY, REVELLO! BEAT THEM OFF AND AVENGE HIM!"

whom he learned to love with all the ardor of his nature.

One day he had asked her father for the hand of his daughter, and was refused.

That night his vessel sailed from her anchorage; and with it went the young girl, who had left parents and home to follow the fortunes of a sea-wanderer, whose past life was unknown to her.

It was years before the Spanish cruiser again visited those shores; then, one night, she sailed slowly up to her old anchorage.

The anchor was let fall, the sails furled, and a boat put off from the vessel for the shore.

In it were two oarsmen, and three others in the stern-sheets.

It was a beautiful moonlight night, only a balmy breeze was blowing from the south, and the waves fell in tiny breakers upon the sandy shore.

The cliffs, of almost carmine hue, loomed grandly up a couple of hundred feet above the waters of the bay, and the summit was covered with a forest of mingled magnolias and pines of majestic growth.

Within the shelter of this forest, crossing the top of the cliffs, was the cottage house of Reginald Lomax, the New Orleans merchant, who had sought a summer retreat there.

It was this pretty house that Lucille Lomax had abandoned that night, five years before, when she had gone to sail the seas with her sailor lover.

Now she was returning after that lapse of time, with her husband and her child—a baby boy of three, hoping that the sight of her child would condone her act in the eyes of her good parents, and obtain for her forgiveness and welcome.

The boat landed upon the shore; the oarsmen aided the lady and her child to the sands, and were told to wait, while the sailor-captain led the way up the winding path to the cottage, carrying his boy in his arms.

As they reached the woodland the man halted, and his wife said:

"I will go on alone with little Reginald, Rudolph, to let them meet me first, then I will call you, and you will be welcomed, for they do not know all—they must never know!"

"No; it is our secret, Lucille, and for the sake of your parents and our little boy, we will keep it. But I see no light in the cottage."

"They have retired, doubtless, though it is full early yet."

"You await me here until I call."

She walked on up the path, leading the little boy by the hand, and slowly neared the cottage.

A flood of strange memories rushed over her as she drew closer and closer to the home of her girlhood, and pausing again and again, she would press her kerchief to her eyes, while a low moan came from her lips, as though her heart was wrung with bitterest anguish.

The man halted near a clump of trees, and watched her until she disappeared in the moonlight, going toward the cottage and leading her little boy by the hand.

He stood on the cliff gazing down upon the scene spread before him, now illuminated by the bright rays of a full moon.

Up and down, the coast stretched away in a dark outline of wooded shores for miles, while in its front, leagues distant, glimmered the lights of the then small town of Mobile.

A few cables' length off-shore, almost so near it seemed that he could have tossed a stone upon her deck, lay his own vessel, a trim-built, graceful brig, motionless upon the barely rippled waters.

She was a vessel of nearly three hundred tons burden, carried a heavy armament of six guns to a broadside, and pivot thirty-twos fore and aft, with a hundred men to man her.

Her decks were quiet as the grave now; no flag floated over her, and only an officer pacing the quarter-deck, or a seaman here and there lounging upon the bulwarks lost in thought and the beauty of the surroundings, were visible.

The commander ashore stood gazing upon all, the moonlight shining full upon his face, for he had bared his head to the balmy breeze.

He was a dark-faced, black-haired man of thirty-five, evidently of Spanish birth.

His face was handsome, his eyes black and piercing, while his stern mouth was concealed by a dark, silken mustache, with long ends curling upward, which gave to his countenance an expression of fierceness, almost.

He was dressed in a black uniform, trimmed elaborately with silver lace, and his broad shoulders were ornamented with massive epaulettes.

The dark hat which he held in his hand was surmounted by a massive black plume, pinned in with a flashing anchor of rubies. A fascinating man he looked, a dangerous one he might be; but, what he really was, the sequel will show.

He saw the form of his wife and child disappear toward the cottage, and he waited patiently, apparently in calm enjoyment of the scene and hour, believing himself alone until, suddenly, with a cry and a spring like a panther upon its prey, a man's form leaped from the shadow of a group of magnolias a few feet distant and confronted him.

In spite of his nerve, the sailor started, his right hand dropping involuntarily upon his sword-hilt, as he heard the words firmly uttered:

"Rudolph Revello, you robbed me of my child and you shall die, assassin of love and honor that you are!"

The speaker then rushed upon the sailor, a long-bladed knife upraised in his hand, his look and action that of a man who meant to kill.

"Back, old man, and hear me!" cried the officer as he retreated slowly, his sword now drawn and on guard to protect himself from the assault.

"Silence, destroyer! I will have your life for your sin against me and mine!" and the man rushed forward with uplifted knife—rushed to his death upon the sword-point of the sailor.

CHAPTER II.

A MADMAN'S VOW.

WHEN the armed brig came gliding up the bay just at sunset, a man stood upon Red Cliffs watching her approach through a glass, which hung by a hook at his belt.

He was dressed in a suit of coarse material, carried a rifle and long knife and wore on his head a slouch hat, the flap hanging around his head in a peculiar way.

In person he was fully six feet in height and appeared to be the wreck of what had once been a splendid manhood.

He was heavily bearded and wore his hair long, and both were white, rather prematurely than from age, for he could scarcely have passed two-score years and ten.

But the eyes were deep sunken, the face haggard and stamped with suffering, mental rather than physical, and in his whole appearance he impressed a stranger as one who had been dealt bitter blows by a cruel fate.

"My God! Suppose it should be he?" he suddenly exclaimed.

Again he lowered the glass and said slowly:

"He carries no flag, so I know not his nativity, but the craft looks like a West Indian."

Time was, when he could have gotten rich rich booty in my home yonder, if he was a buccaneer, but, alas! nothing is left now but wreck and death. Graves fill my heart, bitter memories overwhelm me, and my brain is turned by my sorrows.

"Men say I am mad, and I suppose I am. Grief has maddened me. He entered my peaceful home like a thief in the night and robbed me of my only child.

"She fled from us who loved her so, and it killed her poor mother, and she too left me, but I have her grave, I have her ashes a few feet beneath the sod."

He turned sadly as he spoke, momentarily forgetting the vessel, and walked back among the magnolias and vines.

There he came upon a rustic fence half-hidden with jasmin and honeysuckle vines. Within the inclosure was a grave, and over its only monument were masses of lilies of the valley, and violets, the sweet perfume of each filling the air.

There was a rustic seat near the grave, and upon this the man sunk, burying his face in his hands as though he mourned for one just buried there.

When he raised his head the sun had set, the twilight had faded and the moon shed its luster over the scene.

He arose sadly and walked on up the cliff toward the point on which stood his house.

It was, or had been a lovely spot, for the house of one-story only, was commodious, with broad piazzas upon three sides, upon the columns and railings of which had grown ivy, jasmin and other vines, and the place was almost hidden by their luxuriance.

There was no light to welcome the owner to his home, all being dark and desolate; but the door stood ajar.

The man entered, and soon had a fire burning upon the hearth, shedding a cheerful light over the room.

It was a large room, and well furnished, but all neglected now and wearing the stamp of decay.

Once it had been the parlor, but now a cot bed was there, and upon the hearth were cooking utensils, showing that he cooked and slept there.

He put on a pot of coffee, toasted some bread, and this was his frugal supper.

Then he arose, and lighting a lamp, strolled toward another part of the house.

He stopped at the door of a room in the wing, took a key from his pocket, unlocked it, and entered.

It was in strange contrast to the rest of the house, for it was in order and well cared for.

A shawl lay upon the bed, a pair of tiny slippers peeped out from under a chair, a riding-whip and gloves were upon a table, seeming to indicate that the room had recently been occupied.

Over the mantel hung a portrait, artistically painted, of a young and exquisitely beautiful girl of seventeen, her hands resting upon a Spanish guitar, as though playing.

The man took off his hat when he entered this room, and glanced around him with a look that was pitiful in its intense distress.

At last he started and said:

"Ha! I had forgotten the brig that I saw down in the bay. It may bring him back here to feel my revenge for his crime against me and mine. I will go at once and see if Heaven has sent him back within reach of my avenging arm, for as he has destroyed my child, murdered her mother, and burdened my brain with madness, so will I slay him, slayer of happiness that he is!"

He retraced his way, locking the door after him, blew out the lamp and left the cottage.

He walked rapidly now down the path back some distance from the edge of the cliff, and at last came out at a point near a group of trees, where the way led down to the shore, two hundred feet below.

He was about to step out upon the cliff when his eyes fell upon the brig at anchor off the shore. Then he beheld, not ten paces from him, the form of a man come into sight.

He did not see the forms of the mother and her child going on up to the cottage by the path that bordered the edge of the cliff, some three hundred yards away.

Only the man before him he beheld, standing with uncovered head, and where the moonlight fell full upon him, revealing every feature and expression of his face distinctly.

Like a crouching tiger the madman remained for minutes, until at last he seemed wrought up to act.

He had recognized the dark handsome face of Rudolph Revello, who, five years before, had stolen from him his loved daughter, Lucille.

In his crazed brain he felt that Heaven had guided his enemy back to him to be slain by the wronged father's own hand.

"Her mother told me to watch and wait, for some day he would surely return. I have waited so long, so patiently! But now he has come, and I will strike the avenging blow as Heaven has commanded me to do."

From his belt the madman whipped his long knife, and, with a cry of frenzy, made the fatal spring upon the sea rover.

CHAPTER III.

HER RETURN.

ON the way up the bay the returning daughter had not had it in her heart to remain on the deck of the brig and view the scenes she had known so well from her earliest girlhood.

She had declined the invitation of her husband to come on deck, and had remained below in the cabin of the brig, where her little boy lay fast asleep.

The cabin was a spacious one, and the first thing that would have struck a visitor's eyes would have been its gorgeous and luxurious furnishing.

The stern ports were large, and on account of the balmy night, were open.

A lamp of rare workmanship, and of ancient manufacture, hung over a center table upon which was a gold-embroidered cloth of heavy velvet.

There were inviting divans and easy-chairs scattered about, paintings swung about in profusion, and weapons and bric-a-brac from many lands.

There were upon the floor the softest of carpeting, and forward of the cabin were two large state-rooms, one on either side of a gangway, which led to another compartment where the captain and his wife ate and which were also the quarters of a negress who had followed her young mistress into the new life she had embarked upon as the bride of a sea-wanderer.

The negress lay asleep by an open port, unconscious of her being so near her old home, where she too had left kinsfolk most dear to her.

The mother sat in the cabin by a divan on which lay her sleeping boy, shading his eyes from the lamp.

The books, musical instruments, costly silver service and rare and rich furniture had no charm for her, then, for she was lost in deep meditation.

Her boy was clad in a sailor suit, a uniform, upon each shoulder being a tiny epaulette of gold, while about his neck hung a boatswain's whistle.

He was a handsome boy, with his mother's dark-blue, lustrous eyes and refined features, and a look of daring upon his lip that came from his Spanish father.

But the mother was still very beautiful, though her face was sad and anxious now, at times lighting up with joy as she hoped for a warm welcome from her parents after her long absence from them, a forgiving welcome to make her heart glad once more.

It was a face of intelligence as well as beauty, with womanly spirit and resolve stamped upon her refined features, a face to love almost to idolatry, and yet one to dread winning the hatred of.

She was neatly dressed in a dark blue robe, embroidered with silver lace, and a jaunty tar-paulin sheltered her dark auburn locks.

Presently came the call from her husband to come upon deck with her boy, and the words:

"Let Linda sleep, for I will accompany you ashore, Lucille."

The wife obeyed in silence, and, as has been seen went up the steep path accompanied by her husband, who had their boy in his strong arms.

At the bend of the path he left them to go on alone, while he awaited her return to tell him that he too was welcome, or that she was not received in the dear old home, but driven from it as an outcast.

And what feelings almost overwhelmed the beautiful woman as she returned to her girlhood home only her own heart could know.

She felt her limbs trembling as she walked along, leading her boy by the hand.

She saw no light to welcome, but the bright moonlight revealed all most plainly to her vision.

The path appeared weed-grown to her, and upon all there rested a look of decay it seemed.

Could the place be deserted?

Had her parents given up their home there, the retreat so dear to them for two-thirds of the year, from April until December, when they were glad to escape from the hot city?

It was true that her father's yacht was not anchored off the shore, but then it might be absent at the town for stores, whither it had been wont to go each week.

On she went up to the piazza steps, and she saw then how rank grown were the vines about the columns and lattice-work.

They seemed not to have been trimmed for many a long day.

Upon the piazza she beheld but one chair, where she had been wont to see her father's, mother's, her own and others.

This one she recognized as her father's large easy-chair.

The door was open, and her heart gave a sigh of relief, for this told her that the place was not deserted wholly.

Her foot touched the steps and she halted, covering her face with her hands, while her whole form quivered with emotion.

Over her had crept the memory of the night when she had left that home, five years before, to become the bride of a man she loved and trusted, a man whom her father had told her that very day that she must cease to know, for he had just returned from the city where he had heard strange stories of Captain Rudolph Revello.

That night she had strolled forth upon the cliff, to see her lover's brig dropping anchor.

It was just such a night as the one upon which she now returned to her home.

She had stood as though chained to the spot, saw the boat land, her handsome lover leap ashore, and ascend the cliff path, and soon he stood before her.

Then she had told him all her father had said about him. He had laughed at the rumors going the rounds regarding him, told her they were utterly false, and pleaded that she would fly with him then on board his vessel, go to New Orleans and wed him, and returning he would prove to her parents how he had been maligned.

Linda, her negress maid, had come just then to call her in out of the night air, and she had hastily promised to meet him later, prepared for the voyage.

She had kept her word, and Linda accompanied her.

A couple of sailors had raised the luggage Linda had recently gotten out of the house, and placed it in the boat, Captain Revello had aided his wife to the stern-sheets, the negress followed, and ten minutes after the beautiful vessel was sailing down the moonlit bay before a ten-knot breeze.

And now, five years after, upon just such a night, Lucille had returned to the home she had deserted, and with her was her little boy, the tie she hoped would gain for her the forgiveness she sought.

Was it a wonder that her emotions almost overwhelmed her as she stood there on the door-step?

CHAPTER IV.

A MYSTERIOUS TIE.

THE mother waited at the step, while bitter memories overwhelmed her, but at length she controlled her emotion with an effort, and moved across the piazza to the open door.

She dared not enter, for she supposed all were in bed, and cared not to alarm them by her sudden appearance; so she knocked at first lightly, and then louder and louder.

At last she called out, despairing of having her numerous knocks heard:

"Father!"

Still no reply.

"Mother!"

All remained silent within, and she was about to enter when to her ears came the sound of a loud voice, raised in anger:

The voice was not within the house, but without, and she sprung from the piazza to the gravel walk.

She recognized the voice though the words she did not hear.

"My God! it is my father, and he has met Revello!"

With these words she seized her boy in her arms and fled back down the cliff path.

The scene she came upon was one to break a woman's heart.

There lay upon the ground her father, dying!

Above him, his sword in hand, stood her husband!

But, could that be her father—that man with silvery hair and beard?

He was a young man only five years before, when she had left him, and that was an old man lying there.

He turned his eyes upon her as she approached, and the bright moonlight showed who he was, and showed him, too, the boy in her arms.

"Lucille! my child, come to me!"

He spoke faintly and she sprung toward him, forgetting now her child, for she left him standing in the pathway.

"Father, father! I had gone to seek you, had gone up to the old house to ask your forgiveness, and to bring you my baby boy. I heard your cry while I was calling you and mother, and here I ran with all haste to find you—"

"Dying, and by the hand of the man who killed your poor mother, when he robbed us of you, our only child, and made of me a madman."

"Will not your blind infatuation for him now see him as he is? Will you not now bate where you have loved, and avenge your mother and myself, Lucille, for—"

He ceased speaking, suddenly, gave a moan of anguish, and as his lips reddened with blood, his head fell back and he was dead.

"Oh, Heaven have mercy upon me and upon my child!" came in deep-toned anguish from the lips of the woman as she dropped upon her knees by the side of the now dead parent.

For a minute she bent thus, while the little boy, Reginald, crept softly to her side and knelt down also, murmuring in his childish accents:

"Poor old grandpa! I will kill the bad man who kill poor grandpa!"

The stricken woman sprung to her feet at these words—words which caused the father to start as though he had been struck a stinging blow.

"Caramba! the boy knows not what he says. Reginald, my son, I killed your grandfather, I your father, but only because he sought to take my life," and Revello stepped quickly forward. But the boy shrank from him.

"It is false! he did not seek your life, Revello, for had he done so he would not have bidden me avenge him," cried the aroused woman.

"He did seek my life. He attacked me, knife in hand, ere I knew of his being near."

"Had he done so, had he sought to avenge me, would he not have had the right, Revello?" she asked in a voice quivering with anger and grief.

"Then you do not believe me, Lucille?"

The woman making no reply, the man stepped forward and took the long knife from the stiffening hand of the dead man.

"See! here is the knife. I was standing in that spot, awaiting your return, or call, when he sprung from the shadows of that group of trees, saying he would have my life."

"I warned him back, but he was a madman, and to save my own life I took his."

"Now do you believe me, Lucille?"

She looked fixedly into his face for full a minute. Her brain and heart the while seemed moved by some strange emotion to which she would not give vent in words.

At last she said in a tone hoarse with feeling:

"It was fate, Revello, that I should break his heart, and the heart of my mother, and that my poor father should fall by your hand."

"We are creatures of destiny, now, and what your fate, and mine, and our boy's will be, God only knows!"

"Come! let us care for this sacred dust now."

She held out her hand, and her husband grasped it.

Then he said, and he was certainly deeply moved:

"Lucille, I will do all honor to your beloved dead."

"Thank you, Rudolph," she softly replied, and turning to the boy, Revello said:

"Come, Reginald, blow your call for a boat's crew to come ashore."

The little boy placed his whistle to his lips and sounded shrill calls which were responded to from on board the brig.

Soon after a boat crowded with men rowed ashore, and to the officer in charge Revello said:

"Senor Valdiva, prepare this body for burial on the morrow, with all honors, and bring it ashore at eight bells in the morning."

"You will find me at the cottage yonder on the cliff."

"Yes, Senor Captain," answered Officer Valdiva, and he gave an order to his men who raised the body and bore it down the pathway to their boat.

"Come, Lucille, we will find shelter in your house," said Revello tenderly.

"Will you dare cross the threshold of that house?" she suddenly asked.

"Why not?"

"Come," was her reply and taking the hand of her boy she led the way to her home of the long ago.

Knocking again it brought no response, and so they entered, and from the still flickering firelight beheld the lamp, which the sailor lighted.

Then they gazed about them in silence at the change and desolation resting upon all, and he said:

"Lucille, will you care to remain here now, when none you loved are left?"

"No, the tie that binds me to you still keeps me by you, and once again will I follow your destinies upon the high seas, Rudolph Revello, for it is your destiny and mine that I should."

CHAPTER V.

A DESERTED HOME.

LITTLE Reginald was placed to sleep upon a sofa, by his mother, who then said:

"Come, will you go over the house with me, or will you remain here?"

"I have no desire to hunt through the musty old building, Lucille, so go alone."

"I will sit out on the piazza in the moonlight, and smoke, for there is a chair there."

"My father's chair!" she said with a shudder.

"So be it; I know it will be comfort, for he loved his ease, as I remember him."

With this he lighted a cigar and took his seat on the piazza, in the chair of the man whom he had killed not half an hour before.

A strange expression came over the face of Lucille, but she made no further comment, but taking up the lamp, began her search through the house.

How well she knew every nook and corner, and she went from room to room in a way that showed she was all attention to anything she might behold to tell her what the death-silenced lips of her father could not make known.

If she expected to find any one in the house she was disappointed, for she now discovered that it was tenantless.

That her father had dwelt there and alone was quickly revealed to her.

She saw how he had lived there in solitary grief, cooking his own meals, sleeping upon a pile of blankets, and leading an aimless life in the home he had loved so well, and which was now a scene of solitude and decay.

Her mother's room she found as it had been in the long ago, for that her father had left as it was, in respect to the memory of his loved dead.

Her own room was the last she entered, and she could scarce find courage to go there.

She halted upon the threshold, and what she saw told her how she, too, had been loved and mourned.

Nothing was changed there from what it had been upon the night of her flight five years before.

In an agony of grief she threw herself down upon the bed and burst into tears.

The tears relieved her, and after spending some time looking about the room, she returned to the parlor, placed the lamp upon a table, and taking a chair out sat down near her husband.

She had been gone two hours or more, and yet he seemed not to have moved from his chair.

He had not been sleeping, for the fire burned brightly at the end of his cigar.

It was a couple of hours past midnight, and the moon was traveling on its way toward the western horizon, but still as bright as before.

"Well, Lucille, who have you found?" he asked, as she sat down near him.

"Only haunting memories of a once happy past, Rudolph."

"I hate ghosts."

"Yes, and they must forever dwell here now."

"Did you find only spooks?"

"I found no one here, Rudolph."

"No servants?"

"Not one."

"Where are they?"

"Not a soul has dwelt here, I am sure, for years, excepting my poor father."

"Then he was indeed a madman."

"It would seem so."

"And you care not to remain?"

"Why should I?"

"You do not fear to still sail the seas?"

"I fear nothing."

"And would rear our son upon an armed deck?"

"Why not?"

"I am content, if you are."

"But, Rudolph?"

"Well?"

"Why not let this be your retreat, for it is my home. I must be the heiress, as I had no sister or brother, no near kindred, and you could bide here the treasure that you carry aboard ship."

"Lucille, you have run afoul of my very thoughts when you came out, for I was thinking of that very thing."

"I am glad, for it seemed to me that some day it might be an abiding-place for us, for Reginald, who would not be known as—"

"Sh! Do not give vent to thoughts that had best remain unspoken."

"But I will say that I, too, wish some day a home, where I can spend my latter days in peace and luxury."

"Luxury, yes; but can you say in peace, Rudolph?"

"We will not discuss my words, Lucille; but I have an idea that it will be well to take advantage of this burial of your father, to hide the treasure at the same time."

"It can be brought ashore in your luggage, for I will anchor here for a couple of weeks to repair and paint the brig, and at night I can bury the treasure myself, in some secluded spot."

"But you have much more than what is upon the brig now?"

"Oh, yes; and I can bring that here at another time, say a couple of years or more, hence, when I decide to give up the sea and live like a gentleman."

"I can build a house here that will be as grand as a Don's, and we will be courted by all who have the honor of knowing us, for of course no one must ever know how your father died, and you married a rich Spanish naval officer, you know."

"Yes, so must all be told, for no shadow shall ever hang over the name and honor of my boy, Rudolph."

"No, for he will be too young, even several years hence, for impressions to be lasting upon his mind."

"Perhaps so," was the quiet reply.

"Well, if you do not fear to remain here, I will go aboard and get the treasure in your kit and mine, to send ashore, and bring Linda with me at dawn, with some food, for we won't starve in the old rookery."

"Do you fear to remain alone?"

"I have my boy with me."

"A child, what does he amount to? but as you are not afraid I will go."

"It will be best, and our remaining for several weeks and sending the kits ashore, will not cause the men to suspect that the treasure is being removed."

"All right, I am off, Lucille, so leave you with the spooks, your dead kinsfolk," and the man walked away along the cliff path, while the woman gazed silently after him.

She seemed not to count time as it sped, for she started when she heard voices, and saw that dawn had faded the moonlight, and half-a-dozen seamen were approaching, bearing with them her luggage and her husband's.

Ahead of them came Captain Revello, and with him was Linda, her maid, who had a wondering look upon her black face.

The seamen deposited the kits within the house and retired, and Captain Revello said:

"Now, Lucille, let us lay your father to rest, for his body accompanied us ashore."

CHAPTER VI.

AT REST.

AMONG the magnolias, back from the cliff, where the land sloped down to the banks of a crystal stream, was the grave of Mrs. Lomax, the mother of Lucille.

She had faded away after the flight of her loved daughter, never rallying from the shock, and at last she had sunk to sleep with the words:

"I forgive her, my husband, as you must also."

The devoted husband, who had tenderly nursed his wife through all, laid her to rest down on the brookside among the magnolias, covered her grave with flowers and built about it a rustic fence.

Then he sold his slaves, gave up his business, and settled down to a life of solitude and sorrow in his desolate home, a life that could end but in a diseased brain.

The neighbors soon deemed the recluse mad, and his house was avoided by all, many asserting that the spot was haunted.

All kinds of rumors regarding the poor man and his runaway daughter were told until Red Cliffs became regarded as a weird and ill-omened spot, to be avoided by all good people.

At last had the end come to Reginald Lomax himself, as has been seen, and by the hand of the man who had robbed him of his child, thus bringing all this grief and wreck upon his home and people.

The body of the poor recluse of Red Cliffs had been placed in a coffin, by the carpenter of the brig, and a number of seamen had brought it on shore.

The sleeping boy had been aroused by his mother, when Captain Revello came for her, and the latter had said:

"Why disturb him?"

"I wish him to witness the burial of his grandfather."

"He cannot understand it."

"Such a scene will not be forgotten even by one so young," was the answer, and so Lucille was ready, and with her little boy accompanied the sailor to the bend in the cliff path where the men awaited.

She leant heavily upon the arm of her husband with one hand, while the other held that of little Reginald, who seemed much interested in all that occurred.

Lucille cast a quick glance at the coffin and gave a sigh of relief, for it was covered by an American flag.

"I thank you for that, Rudolph," she said in a low tone, and heading the procession, the sea captain led the way to the spot whither sailors had already been sent to dig a grave.

Captain Revello had sought the place early in the morning, when he was upon his way to the cottage, and had selected the spot for the grave of his victim by the side of his wife.

The little rustic fence came into view, then the four sailors standing by the open grave and a moment after Lucille had dropped upon her knees by the side of the mound beneath which lay her mother's form crumbling to dust.

A moment she knelt there, while a tremor ran through her form, showing how deep was her grief, while by her side was her little boy in the same devout attitude.

What the dark-faced stern man felt, who stood there with folded arms, who could tell?

Not a muscle of his face moved, and his expression was one of simple sorrow for the suffering of his wife.

What the men thought he neither knew or cared.

They at least knew that it was the home of the captain's wife, and that her father had either been slain or had taken his own life.

Their chief offered no explanations, and not one of the crew, officers or men, had the hardihood to ask.

What Lucille felt and thought can be readily imagined.

At last the captain touched Lucille upon the shoulder and gently said:

"Come, senora, let us consign the body to the grave."

She rose in silence, glanced down into the open grave with a shudder, then bending over the flag-covered coffin impressed two kisses upon it.

Her glance then fell full upon her husband's face and without a word she stepped to his side, saying:

"Let them bury him now."

Captain Revello made a sign to the officer who had accompanied the men, and the body was lowered into the grave.

Not a word was said, not a prayer audibly uttered, though Lucille's lips moved as though they gave utterance to a benediction.

Another sign, and the dirt fell with hollow sound upon the coffin, which soon disappeared from sight.

The mound was shaped by one of the men who seemed to understand his work well, and then the chief said:

"Return to the brig, senor, and set the men at the repairs."

The officer addressed saluted, and the men were marched away in silence, leaving the captain, Lucille, and the little boy at the grave.

"Come, Lucille, let us return to the cottage, for Linda will have breakfast ready."

"Go, for I will soon follow," she said in a low tone, and the man obeyed.

He would have led the boy, but she clung to him, and so the mother and her son were left alone.

When he had gotten well away, Revello turned and looked back.

He saw the mother and the boy kneeling between the two graves, with their hands clasped and raised above their heads.

"They are praying," he muttered, and strode on to the cottage.

Linda had breakfast nearly ready, and had put things to rights, so that the cottage looked more inviting.

But the negress seemed sad-faced, and asked the chief for her people.

"I know nothing of them, and suppose all are dead."

"Your master lived here alone and had become mad, and he was the only living being I saw."

"When we met he—well, he committed suicide."

"Now, attend to your work and say no more about it," and Linda knew the captain too well to say more.

It was some time before Lucille came, leading little Reginald.

She was very pale, but perfectly calm, and sat down to breakfast as though determined to say no more of her grief.

After the meal the chief took a rifle and walked out on a hunt, he said, for game; but, strange to say, he let several fine shots go by unmolested, while he continued his search, and at last halted not very far from the graves of Mr. Lomax and his wife.

It was a wild spot where he halted, on the point of a spur where it seemed no one would ever care to go.

"This is the very place where the treasure can be hidden. I will begin to-night," he said, and, shouldering his rifle, he retraced his way to the cottage, now looking for game, as he had found the site he wished in which to hide his treasure.

CHAPTER VII.

A FAIR SPY.

WHEN night came on Revello began what he called "his work"—a work in which he did not call upon his crew to aid him; and neither did he seek the assistance of his wife.

She asked him if she or Linda could not help him, but he declined their aid, and more, he urged that his wife should retire early, and get the rest she sadly needed.

She obeyed by going to her room, the one in which the days of her girlhood and maidenhood had been passed.

Reginald was put to bed, and the door was locked.

Then Lucille sat down to think over the last time she had slept in that cozy chamber.

Reginald went to sleep very readily, but instead of following his example the mother softly crept from the room, locking the door after her, and leaving the house by a rear door, sought a shelter in the evergreen bushes near.

She saw a light in the parlor, and then she heard her husband moving about.

She knew that he was getting the treasure together, preparatory to burying it.

Soon he came out of the house, and he carried upon his shoulders a heavy load.

He had discarded his uniform suit and hat for one better suited to work in, and set off through the bushes, not appearing to desire to follow the beaten path.

But he did not know that there was a spy upon his track, one who was shadowing him closely.

On down the hill he went toward the brook, giving the graves a wide berth, crossing the stream unmindful of getting wet to the knees, and climbing to the spur before referred to, which he had selected as the burial-place for the treasure.

The moon was just rising as he reached the spot, and into the timber its rays did not penetrate, so he opened a dark-lantern, and glanced about him searchingly.

It was not long before he set to work, digging what appeared to be a grave.

Every particle of earth was placed upon a canvas he had brought with him, and spread for it, so as to leave no trace.

The hole dug, and it went to the depth of five feet, he placed within it what appeared to be heavily tarred canvas.

Then the treasure he had brought with him was placed securely away, the lantern closed and the man began to retrace his way to the cottage.

But ahead of him quickly glided the fair spy upon his movements, and gaining the cottage she quickly entered her room and locked the door after her.

She heard him enter and soon he came to her door and knocked.

She did not reply, so he knocked louder.

"Who is there?" she asked in a dreamy tone.

"It is I, Lucille, and I only wished to see if you were asleep or lying awake worrying?"

"No, I am not worrying, for I need sleep, Rudolph."

"Can I do anything for you?"

"No, thank you."

He turned and walked away, going to the parlor once more.

Did he suspect her, she wondered?

It seemed so from his actions.

This time she did not leave by her door, but slipped out of the window.

The moon was shining brightly now, and she secreted herself in a place where she could see him when he passed out of the house.

She was not sure that he meant to bury all in the same place.

At last he appeared, bearing another load, and to the same spot on the spur of the hill he wended his way.

She saw now that he did not use the dark lantern, for its rays were not visible, and the moonlight was sufficient to light him in his work.

After some time he again started for the house, and once more she regained her room and waited.

He came to her door and listened, but as though satisfied that she was asleep he returned to the parlor and took away to its hiding-place the third and last load of treasure.

But for the third time she was upon his track, a spy upon his actions, this midnight burial of the treasure which had been brought from the brig.

When convinced that the man had taken all of the treasure, and having seen him to his hiding-place, Lucille retraced her way to the cottage and was soon in her room.

Throwing herself upon her bed, she sank at once into a dreamless sleep, for she was utterly worn out with all that she had passed through.

The sun was high in the heavens when she awoke, the birds singing merrily, and little Reginald had slipped out without waking his mother and was enjoying seeing Linda prepare breakfast.

"Ah, little master, it's sad scenes here now in de ole home," sighed Linda, recalling her once happy past there.

"All dem your manna and me loved is done gone foreber, and we is all dat's left."

"Well, I s'pose it's de will ob Hebbin, and Linda hain't one ter complain ag'in' de Lord's doin's; but wicked dreams came to me last night and I seen heaps o' trouble in de lives of us all for de future."

"Lord bress yer soul, chile, I does hope and pray yer'll be happy, but somehow it looks ill-omen like ter me now— Ah! dere's yer mamma callin' now," and the boy hastened away at the call of his mother.

Soon Mrs. Revello appeared in the breakfast-room, and a moment after her husband joined her there.

He had been aboard the brig, he said, to hasten on the repairs, and in a low tone he remarked:

"I put the treasure away, Lucille, in a safe place, and will give you a paper of directions how to find it when we are alone, in case anything should happen to me."

"And our boy should know, too."

"Yes, the directions can be left for him in case both of us died."

They ate breakfast together in almost silence, and after the meal the captain handed her a paper which he had drawn of the hiding-place of the treasure.

Lucille took it, looked at it carefully, and thanked him; but when he returned to the vessel, she said to herself, while a peculiar look came over her face:

"It is well that I played the spy on him last night, for this paper of directions is false, utterly false."

"Why he would deceive me in this matter I do not know; but I know more than he dreams I do, and— But I can wait," and had Revello seen the look then upon the beautiful face of his wife, he would, in spite of his name, have experienced very uncomfortable feelings.

CHAPTER VIII.

CRUISER OR PIRATE.

THE brig had not lain at anchor off the Red Cliffs, to undergo her repairs, but had waited until nightfall and run up the coast a few miles into an inlet near where still stand the ruins of old Spanish Fort.

Here she could not be seen from the port of Mobile, or by vessels passing up and down the bay to the Gulf, and for some reason Captain Revello seemed to wish to conceal his craft.

In the inlet near Spanish Fort he found an excellent retreat, his brig being moored close along the shore, so that gaupplanks extended from the deck ashore.

There was excellent timber for spars and other work needed close at hand, and the men were soon all busy in mending sails, bending on new canvas in place of old, painting and doing all carpenter work needed.

From springs near the casks were all filled with water, and hunters found plenty of game to kill, and it was cured and sent on board.

Thus two weeks passed and the brig looked like a new vessel, for her bottom had been scraped and painted and everything done that would add to her speed, stanchness and comfort.

Each day early Captain Revello, his rifle on his shoulder, would walk from the cottage to where the brig lay, and back again at night.

The run ashore of two weeks seemed to do him, and his men also, a great deal of good, and little Reginald and Linda appeared to greatly enjoy it; but Lucille was strangely silent, and her face showed that she suffered much.

She had dearly loved her father, Revello well knew, and to return and behold him meet such a fate as he had, he was well aware was a crushing blow to her.

But that aught else than her sorrow for her parents lay upon her heart he did not suspect.

One afternoon the yawl, sent to Mobile to purchase stores, was seen returning across the bay with all speed.

She had her mainsail and jib set, and there were four oars out as well, the men pulling hard.

Captain Revello had just returned from a hunt, followed by half a dozen men bearing two large deer swung upon a pole and others carrying wild turkeys and ducks by the score.

He hastened to have a look at the yawl through his glass, and instantly his voice rung out:

"Ho, men, all of you get aboard, and set sail, for we have to run for it."

"Here, Pedro, make those nimble feet of yours fly to the cottage and bid my wife come off in the boat there at once, with Reginald, Linda and the luggage."

"You row them off, and head straight out, so as to cross my bows."

"Do you understand?"

"Yes, Senor Captain," answered the man Pedro, who was a West Indian from Jamaica, and he bounded away like a deer along the shore.

"He has time to do it easily, if he keeps that pace," said Revello, and he again turned his attention to the coming yawl, now about a league away.

The men were hastily breaking camp, for they had been sleeping ashore during their stay,

and were getting the things aboard ship and in place.

Others were setting sail, others getting up the anchor, and two boats were going out ahead to tow out of the inlet into open water where the breeze would strike her fair.

The wind was from the west and was blowing ten knots, so that the brig would have a fair course down the bay, and could run close in toward Red Cliffs as well.

Watching the yawl as she drew nearer, now coming directly before the wind, and hugging the shoals closely, Captain Revello saw that the officer in charge was taking advantage of the broad surface of the mainsail, to hold signal flags up against it for him to read.

"Ah! that reads that two American vessels-of-war entered port last night, and have heard that the brig is in these waters."

"Well, Antoine Estal is a brave fellow, and not to be easily frightened, and he knows more than he signals."

"But we will be ready for him," and Captain Revello hastened on board the brig, and his stern voice made the men spring to work with greater will, and soon came the report:

"All ready, sir."

"Ay, ay!"

"Ho, those boats ahead!"

"Ay, ay, sir," responded the officers in charge.

"Give way and with a will."

"Pull for all there is in you!"

The oars fell with a splash and soon the bows of the brig had swung round, she had gained headway and was running slowly out of the inlet.

It was a pull of a quarter of a mile, and as she swung out into open water the yawl was right at hand.

The crew in the yawl gave a cheer as they saw the brig, and a handsome man stood up in the stern-sheets and called out:

"Bravo, Captain Revello, for not being caught napping, as you have no time to lose— see there!"

He pointed as he spoke toward the port of Mobile, twelve miles away.

There, coming out of Mobile River, all saw two vessels, one a brig, the other a schooner, and one glance was sufficient to prove to a sailor's eye that they were cruisers.

"I see them, and we have just time to run out ahead of them about a league, if we are not detained picking up the boat from the cottage," said Captain Revello quietly.

As the brig now felt the breeze the boats were called in from ahead, and the yawl now came alongside and was taken in tow, while the stores brought were hastily taken on board.

"You got the stores, Estal, I am glad to see," said Captain Revello.

"Oh yes, captain, I got those last night, but being suspected was watched, so had to take chances and slip away."

"The moment it was found that I was gone, word was sent to the two cruisers to pursue, for I would naturally go to where the brig lay."

"But how was it known that we were here?"

"Oh, some one reported it, captain, you may be certain, from down the bay, when we were seen to come in."

"And those two cruisers?"

"Are both Americans, señor, the schooner very nearly our equal in strength, and the brig our superior, while both are fast flyers."

"Well, they shall have a chance to test their speed; but what do they say we are?"

"Why, captain, they call us pirates," and Officer Estal laughed.

"Indeed, they mistake a Mexican cruiser for a pirate, do they?"

"Yes, sir, and as the Americans put little faith in the eagle and the serpent flag at sea, we will have to run for it, or fight," was Estal's response.

CHAPTER IX.

THE CHASE.

"I WILL run if they will let me, but fight if I must," said Revello sternly, in response to his first lieutenant's remark.

The brig soon had her boats aboard, swung at the davits, and the men ranged quietly at quarters, as though accustomed to such scenes, while others stood by the halyards ready to work the sails when an order came to do so.

The anchors were lashed, the guns set free and all was ready to fight if it was forced upon the commander of the brig to do so.

The seaport was visible far away off the starboard quarter, and between the brig and her foes, if such they should prove, there was a wide stretch of shoal water and salt marsh, extending some three leagues.

The three vessels were running toward a certain point far down the bay, about for the mouth of Dog River, and if the mysterious brig was a very fleet sailor it would bring her and her pursuers there with them but a very short distance astern.

If a fleet goer, then the stranger might expect to reach the turning point in the channel perhaps a league ahead.

But then there was a stop to be made off the

cottage, a league away down the coast, for the boat to put off from Red Cliffs, and if delayed there the chances were that the stranger craft, which had entered Mobile Bay, had run her nose into very close quarters, should she prove to be a craft whose colors the two American vessels would not recognize.

With the point where she hoped to shoot out well ahead of the two pursuers only some five leagues away, and the Red Cliffs looming up on her port bow, there was considerable anxiety shown by the crew for the appearance of the boat coming off from the shore.

Leaving officer Estal in charge of the flying brig, Captain Revello went aloft with his glass for a survey.

He first turned his gaze upon the Red Cliffs, but saw no sign of a boat putting off, and he muttered something very like a Spanish imprecation.

Then he leveled his glass upon the two vessels.

They were running close together, the schooner leading the brig by only a cable's length, and both were covered with all the canvas that would draw, with the wind over their starboard quarter.

They were coming along at a slapping pace, too, with a "bone in their teeth," for a crest of foam was curling from the bows of each craft.

Captain Revello counted their guns, noted that their decks were full of men, showing that they were well manned, and saw at their peaks the flag of the United States.

He watched their going for awhile, and then regarded his own vessel from his high position.

"They sail splendidly, that is certain, and we have got to lose no time if we wish to get out there ahead of them."

"I could run on out and leave Lucille and the boy, to come for them at another time, but then it might get them into trouble, and if I can get them aboard I will."

"Once I shoot out a mile in the lead I can hold them at bay, unless I am crippled."

"But I must spread more canvas, and I only wish the wind was blowing half a gale, for in these quiet waters of the bay the brig could fairly fly."

"Ho, the deck, there!"

"Ay, ay, sir," responded Officer Estal.

"Crowd on every stitch she will bear, Estal, for we dare not loiter here."

"Ay, ay, sir, but you notice from the sea she is dragging astern that her keel is very near the bottom."

"True, but the depth increases every moment, and once off the cliffs we will have all the water we need."

"Ay, ay, sir," responded Estal, and his voice was heard to crowd more sail upon the brig.

She stood it well, and increased her speed considerably, dragging after her a following sea that looked threatening, while the closeness of her keel to the bottom rendered her very hard to steer.

But, as Captain Revello had said, the depth constantly increased, and as it did, her speed became greater.

Turning his eyes again upon the shore at the base of the Red Cliffs, the captain gave an exclamation of delight as he saw a boat shove out from the shelter of the land.

It was one of the long sailing canoes so generally in use upon the Gulf shores, and was capable of carrying a heavy load and standing a rough sea.

She had a mainsail and jib set and was laying close to the wind to head off the brig.

If she could hold her course, without falling off she would meet the brig just where Revello wished; but if the waves beat her bows off, then it would be further down the bay a mile or so, and would thus cause a delay of a quarter of an hour or more.

Pedro, the West Indian, was at the helm, and Captain Revello saw also in the boat his wife, Reginald and Linda the negress.

There was also the luggage taken ashore, visible in the *punta* forward, showing that Pedro had made a rapid run of it to the cottage and done his work well to get all down to the boat in time.

That the baggage did not contain the treasure which had been sent ashore in it, Revello smiled grimly to know, though to prevent the fact being discovered by the sailors in handling the baggage he had weighted them with bags of sand.

The wind increased as the small boat stood out, and naturally the sea with it, which caused Pedro to see that he could not hold his present course and still make good headway, so he let his bow fall off some points and went dashing away at a swifter pace, and which would bring him alongside the brig a mile below where he had intended.

As the two neared each other, the brig fairly flying along, Captain Revello saw that in the sea then running the *punta* could never come alongside of the vessel while both were in motion, and that he would have to lay to was a foregone conclusion.

So he gave the order to run down nearer to the *punta*, pass her by and then sweep quickly up into the wind, while he called out to the Indian helmsman of the *punta*:

"Ho! Pedro."

"Ay, ay, senor," responded the West Indian, and he never took his eyes off his work, managing the *punta* with the greatest skill.

"I will run by you, shaving close, and run up into the wind, so try and run up under my lee before we lose headway, for every second counts now."

"Yes, senor."

"Stand by men, to throw lines and get them aboard from the *punta*.

"You take the helm, Senor Estal, for you manage the brig better than anyone else in close places."

The officer addressed bowed, and stepping to the wheel relieved the two men there from duty for the time being.

"All ready, sir," he said, as the brig swept by the *punta* to leeward, as though the little boat was at anchor, and springing upon the bulwarks to windward, Captain Revello called out:

"Now, Estal, bring her up!"

CHAPTER X.

RUNNING A GANTLET.

OFFICER ESTAL proved himself worthy of the praise bestowed upon him by his chief, for he had allowed the brig to fall to leeward of the *punta*, and yet had kept her so close as to seem to endanger those in the boat from being run down.

The moment the brig had swept by her length, Captain Revello had given the order and the graceful craft swept up into the wind slowly, still holding headway.

So well did Estal manage her that the *punta* came dashing alongside, and was lashed fast while the brig still moved on her way, though slowly.

In a minute of time Reginald had been seized by a sailor on the leeward gangway steps, and tossed to a mate on the bulwarks. Linda had been bodily dragged up to the deck, while Captain Revello had extended a hand to his wife and drawn her on board.

Pedro had tossed the luggage to the waiting sailors, and as the brig was about to lose her headway, Officer Estal allowed her to fall off slowly, her sails filled, and she was beginning to dash along again when Pedro called out:

"All ready, men?"

"Cast off!"

At the command Pedro sprung to the gangway, the *punta* was cast loose, and the brig went well over to the stiffening breeze and began to forge rapidly through the waters again, leaving the little boat dancing in her wake with her sails still set.

"Just five minutes delay, Estal."

"You did that admirably," said Captain Revello, as he led his wife near the officer on their way to the cabin.

Officer Estal raised his hat to the lady and said, in a courteous way that seemed natural to him:

"I am glad to see you aboard ship, Senora Revello."

"And you, too, little captain," he added, as Reginald ran up to him.

Lucille bowed but made no reply, and passed on into the cabin, yet she overheard the remark of a sailor:

"Now, we will escape, as our Lady of Good Luck is again on board the brig."

Having seen Lucille to the cabin Revello was turning to go upon deck again when she asked:

"What is the danger, Captain Revello, that required such rapid flight from my home?"

"There are American cruisers in the port of Mobile on the search for outlaw craft, and they regard the brig with suspicion and are in pursuit now, as perhaps you saw."

"Yes, Pedro pointed out a brig and a schooner to me, on their way down the bay; but you can elude them, I suppose?"

"Yes."

"But, if not?"

"I must defend my vessel, Lucille."

"You will not fire upon American vessels-of-war, Revello?" quickly said Lucille.

"Self-preservation is the first law of nature, Lucille."

"But your pledge?"

"Holds good unless I am attacked and cornered."

"Then I shall hit back."

"But not before?"

"No."

With this remark Captain Revello returned to the deck.

He found the brig fairly flying along now under a twelve-knot breeze. She was heading toward the mouth of Dog River, where, after rounding a shoal, she would have a deep water run to the entrance of the bay, her course then bringing the wind a few points from dead astern, in which the vessel was at her best.

The turning-point was but a league away now, with the two cruisers heading for the same position, and distant from the brig something over two miles.

Their course, however, was straight as an arrow to it, while the brig had to lay close to the wind to round the shoal, and if she fell off much

would have to go about and make a tack, which would bring her within easy range of her enemies.

But Estal still held the wheel, and was getting all out of the brig that could be made.

"Do you think she can make it without a tack, Senor Estal?"

"I think so, sir."

"If not, we had better square away for the mouth of Fish River, and so run down the coast after nightfall, by the Shell Banks, if we can."

"We might do it, sir, in the night, if we had a high tide, but it will be low tide after dark, you know."

"True. We must round the shoal on this stretch, that is certain, for a tack would bring us too close to their fire."

"I am glad you kept the helm, Estal, and I will see to trimming the sails and pushing her along in any way possible."

With this the chief went to every balyard and conned each sail to note if it could be improved in any way, to add to the speed of the brig and holding her closer on her course without losing headway.

The sun had begun its downward course toward the western horizon, the wind was freshening constantly, threatening to blow a gale during the night, and the brig, lying well over, but as steady as a staple, was fairly rushing along on her course.

The weight of several of the guns and all of the men had been thrown to windward to hold her on a more level keel, and the crew were enthusiastic over her splendid burst of speed.

Point Clear had been left astern, and the shoal off Dog River lay just ahead now, and a man was sent forward to throw the lead constantly to see if the brig dare hold on, or would have to suddenly go about and make a short leg of it to round the shallow water.

The man's voice rose clear as he called out the depth from the bows, and Senor Estal marked quickly every report, while the men stood ready to let fly all if an order came to go about.

The schooner was now less than two miles away and the brig right astern of her.

The crews of each were seen to be at their guns and that they were ready to fight was very evident.

The brig had nine feet draught, and the wave following astern would have told of shallowing waters, had not the cry of the man forward done so.

Less and less became the depth until the crew grew nervous when they heard the cry from the bows that told them only five feet was between their keel and the bottom.

Four feet was the next thought as they heard the call of but thirteen feet in depth.

All eyes turned upon their captain.

His dark, stern face was perfectly serene, no matter what was the whirlwind raging within.

Then all looked at the officer helmsman.

Antoine Estal's face was unmoved.

He had perfect confidence in himself and his vessel, or he showed at least in his face that he had.

"Only three feet between her keel and the bottom, Estal," called out Captain Revello, and with a quick movement the officer ran her up into the wind until her sails shivered.

But not to go about, for he had marked the water well, traced the shoal point with his experienced eye, and letting the brig fall off again before the wind gave the order to square away, having safely run the gantlet without a tack.

CHAPTER XI.

A WOMAN'S DEMAND.

"SPLENDIDLY done, my good Estal! That was magnificent, and saves the brig."

The words came enthusiastically from Revello, as he beheld the quick bringing up of the brig send her around the point of the shoal and into deep water.

The crew, encouraged by the words of their captain, broke forth into a ringing cheer for the lieutenant, who raised his cap in acknowledgment and left the wheel once more to the two men whom he had called back to their post again.

"Now we will catch their fire, sir," said Senor Estal, as he placed his glass to his eye and turned it upon the two vessels in pursuit.

"Yes, but the brig carries the heaviest metal and fortunately for us she is astern of the schooner."

"True sir, but is maneuvering now to run abeam of her to open fire—see!"

As Estal spoke the schooner's bows fell off considerably, which revealed the brig sailing along astern, in the wake she had just left.

Then from the bows of each came a puff of smoke simultaneously; the roar of the guns followed, with the rushing of the solid shots directly at the flying brig.

"Just a little less than half a league to fire," said Captain Revello quietly, as the shots flew on, one falling near the brig, the other going above her deck.

"Too near for our comfort, sir," laughed Senor Estal. Then he added:

"Shall I run up the colors, sir, and return the fire!"

"They fired to bring us to, and make us show our colors, Estal, so you can run up the flag."

"May I ask which flag, Senor Captain?"

"The eagle and the serpent, sir."

"Ah, yes; our Mexican colors, of course," and Estal gave the order just as two more shots came from the pursuers.

The latter shots were better aimed, for one barely missed the quarter-deck, while the other fell so near as to cast spray upon the crew.

Then up to the peak rose the eagle and serpent flag of Mexico, while Senor Estal said:

"We could cripple them. Shall I try?"

"Well, yes; you—"

"No, you are not to fire upon those American cruisers, Lieutenant Estal!"

Lucille had come upon deck, her eyes burning brightly, while her lips quivered with anger.

"But, Lucille, do you expect me to lose my vessel?" urged Captain Revello, as Senor Estal hesitated.

"There is certainly no danger of it—at least just now; so await until there is, for you are not afraid of a little firing from a foe, are you?"

"Shall I obey your orders, Senor Captain, and fire upon the enemy?" asked the lieutenant, calmly.

"I deem it best to do so, as we cannot afford to be crippled," was the response, and Revello cast an anxious look at his wife.

But the woman had evidently decided upon what she meant to do, for quickly confronting the officer, Lucille said, as she leveled a pistol at his head:

"Dare to obey the order given you, Senor Estal, and I will shoot you dead in your tracks."

This scene upon the decks of the mysterious brig was one to create excitement, and the eyes of the crew became riveted upon the three actors in what appeared would be a tragedy in their midst.

They moved uneasily aft and stood in silence, awaiting the result of the scene between their captain and his beautiful wife.

Estal did not flinch under the danger he was in, but smiled and again asked:

"Shall I obey, Captain Revello?"

The Sea Rover knew only too well that to answer in the affirmative would be to sound the death-knell of his lieutenant—knew that Lucille would keep her threat without an instant of hesitation.

Two more shots coming from the brig and the schooner interrupted his immediate reply, for one of these cut off the head of one of the men at the wheel, while the other shot struck the bulwark rail forward, and wounded several men by a shower of splinters.

But the resolute woman did not move a muscle under this ordeal, nor did the outstretched hand holding the pistol betray a sign of nervousness, for it remained as firm as steel.

"Shall I obey your command, Captain Revello?" repeated the lieutenant with the utmost calmness, showing no emotion whatever, and apparently unconscious of Lucille's holding him under the muzzle of a cocked pistol.

After a moment of hesitation Captain Revello replied:

"Estal, you know our laws must not be broken, and by the chief himself, for Our Lady of Luck has the right to command when she asserts her authority, as she does now."

"No, we will not return the fire of the cruiser, but trust to our speed to escape!"

"And to the good fortune that alway attends us when Our Lady of Luck exerts her influence in our behalf," was the gallant response of the lieutenant.

He raised his cap to Lucille as he passed forward among the men to note the damage done by the last fire of their pursuers.

"You have triumphed, Lucille," said Captain Revello with some show of anger.

"I have kept you from breaking your pledge, Rudolph," was the prompt reply.

The woman now leant over the taffrail and attentively regarded the pursuing vessels, while Reginald ran up the ratlines as nimbly as a monkey could have done and seated himself in the cross-tress.

The situation was now becoming critical for the fugitive brig, for in rounding the shoal and in getting under a straight course down the bay she had lost some little time.

Then, too, she was in a position to be raked by each vessel, while in a straight line, even less than a mile and a quarter from her.

The wind was sending her along all of twelve knots an hour; but in her wake were two very fleet pursuers, far faster than the usual run of cruisers, as all could see, for they held their own with her, or at least appeared to be doing so.

If she could return their fire with her heavy stern pivot, she might cripple her foes; but if not, then the chances were that she would be crippled and probably captured.

Such was the situation.

CHAPTER XII.

A RUNNING FIRE.

THERE seemed an unwritten law on board the mysterious brig which had entered Mobile Bay, and the coming of which had caused a tragedy.

that the Lady of Luck was the ruler, should she declare her right to command when any momentous question came up.

Her husband had yielded to her, as has been seen, and had he not done so the looks of the crew were indicative of an intention to side with her in her cause, even though it cost them their vessel.

What this mysterious tie was that bound them to the woman the sequel will show, but certain it was that Lieutenant Estal yielded very gracefully to the command of the woman and against that of his captain, when he saw that she was in earnest.

The right of Lucille to demand, and have a command obeyed, having been acknowledged, the crew turned their attention to their pursuers.

Three more beautiful craft could hardly be found together in flight and chase than were the brig and her pursuers.

The fugitive craft was as graceful in build as a yacht, carried her battery easily, and was very heavily armed for a vessel of her tonnage.

She had very tall, tapering masts, and was capable of spreading as much canvas as a vessel twice her size.

And now she had set all she dared spread to the stiff breeze, while sailing in comparatively shallow waters, for until she reached the Gulf, four leagues below, she had not even a couple of fathoms between her keel and the bottom.

She had stood well up too, while sailing with the wind abeam under a pressure of canvas, and now, with the breeze rushing over her stern went driving along at a pace that gladdened the hearts of her crew.

All about her was perfectly trim and in place, and thorough discipline ruled her deck from bow-sprit to taffrail.

For a vessel of her tonnage too she was heavily manned, and her crew were an agile, daring, swarthy-faced lot of men, who looked as though they would fight to the death under their commander, be the cause of battle good or bad.

The pursuers of the mysterious craft, as has been said, were a brig of a little heavier tonnage than the fugitive, and a schooner of about equal size, but perhaps with a crew of half a score more men.

They too had every stitch of canvas spread that would draw and were coming along in a determined and ugly way.

At their peak floated the Stars and Stripes, the flag of the Great American Republic, then a little one, a score of years of age, and that they had a prize in the fugitive craft was doubtless their opinion.

The situation was such that the flying brig might escape, and yet might be a prize or have to fight in a very few minutes, should she be crippled.

That Lucille, the Lady of Luck, or "Our Lady of Luck" as the crew of the brig generally called her, would prevent their fighting if cornered the men did not believe.

They knew that she was an American, hence she never cared to see the guns of the brig turned against her countrymen.

The crew had such unbounded confidence in the good fortune of Lucille that they felt sure of an escape from their foes.

But, if they were brought to bay they held equally an unbounded confidence in the fighting, staying and victorious qualities of their captain, and did not allow a thought of defeat to disturb them.

They had been tried before too often to dread a hard fight now, and their good vessel too had never failed them in battle, speed or storm.

As all eyes were turned upon the pursuers, now running abeam, as the wind was astern, so that neither could blanket the other, the bows of each vessel were hidden by a white cloud once more and the thunder of a gun and rushing of heavy shot followed.

"They are improving in their aim, sir," said Antoine Estal as one of the shots cut along the deck of the brig just over the heads of the men, and the other made a rent in mizzen sail.

"Yes, and will do better I fear; but I won't mind torn canvas and a life or two if they will only let our masts and spars alone," the captain responded.

"They are not gaining any, sir."

"No, Estal, I have observed that we are, though."

"I thought so, sir, yet hardly dared give expression to my idea, captain."

"Yes, we are gaining, and will increase our speed as the wind increases and water deepens, for we know what our craft is as a sea-boat, while I am sure neither of those pursuers can cut through rough water as we can."

"So I believe, senor, and it is getting tremendously rough out in the Gulf, for I can see the white caps very distinctly."

"As I can," and raising his voice Captain Revello called out to little Reginald, who still sat upon his perch, unmindful of the firing or the stiff breeze:

"Ho, aloft there!"

"Ay, ay, sir," came back in Reginald's child-like voice, for the lookout near told him to answer.

"How does it look out in the Gulf, sir?" continued Captain Revello.

Instantly every ear was strained to catch the boy's answer, which came in the same boyish tones:

"It looks all right, sir, but pretty rough."

"Ay, ay, and astern, how does it appear?"

"The cruisers are coming, but we can whip them," was the reply in a confident tone, and it brought a cheer from the men.

Before a word more was said a shot from the schooner struck within a few feet of the boy, tore through the sail and striking a spar sent a splinter into the heart of the lookout, who fell with a crash to the deck.

"Oh, God, have mercy upon my little boy!" cried the mother from the deck below, and quickly came the response:

"Me all right, mamma, but poor Barney was killed."

And then, hot and fast came the fire from the pursuers which was doing considerable damage to the spars, sails and crew of the brig, though she held gallantly on her way, receiving the severe punishment in silence, and rushing for safety to the Gulf, where now a gale was blowing.

CHAPTER XIII.

A MYSTERIOUS VISITOR.

ARCHER DEAN, first lieutenant in the United States Navy, and commander of the schooner-of-war "Spiteful," was seated in his cozy cabin, entertaining his friend Captain Louis Dudley, of the United States brig-of-war Battle Bird.

Both vessels were lying at anchor in Mobile River, opposite the town, and had run in the day before, having been cruising in the Gulf, and met off Dauphin Island.

The Spiteful had overhauled a fisherman of the bay, to get a supply of fish, and he had told Lieutenant Dean that an armed vessel, flying no colors, had entered the bay some time before and cruised up the eastern shore, as though hunting a retreat, instead of running boldly up to Mobile.

She had also gone in by night and without a pilot, hiding inshore until the next evening, when she had continued on her way up the bay.

"She may be all right, cap'n, but if she hain't a p'rit, then I don't know a sea thief when I sees one," added the fisherman.

Lieutenant Dean asked many questions about the craft, her rig, size, number of guns and crew, and said:

"Well, my man, I am looking for just such a vessel as you describe, and I will take a run up the bay and have a look at her."

Just then the lookout aloft sung out:

"Sail ho!"

"Ay, ay, and whereaway?" asked the young commander of the schooner.

"Coming down the coast, sir, and now she opens up around the point, I see that she is a brig-of-war, and I believe it is the Battle Bird, we last saw off Key West, sir."

The vessel proved to be the brig-of-war Battle Bird, and she was bound to Mobile with provisions, her captain signaled.

So Archer Dean signaled back that he would also go to Mobile, leading the way, and that there was a suspicious craft known to be there in the bay.

"Come aboard to-night and dine with me," the signal had also read, and the two vessels had anchored off Mobile just at dark that very day, and Captain Louis Dudley had gone aboard the Spiteful to accept the invitation of his brother officer and friend, Archer Dean, and the two were discussing the strange brig, after the meal, over their wine, when a midshipman entered and announced a visitor to see the commander.

Lieutenant Dean was a handsome fellow and a dashing officer, brave and skillful.

He was a very young man, and had risen rapidly by his daring and devotion to his profession.

Captain Dudley was also a fine-looking, courteous gentleman, and had been a lieutenant on a frigate when Dean was a midshipman, the two having become fast friends then, for the senior officer owed his life to his junior in rank, who had saved him from drowning one night when their boat was run down in the harbor of Boston.

Louis Dudley's arm was broken and he could not swim, and Archer Dean had held him up for over an hour until help came to them, refusing to swim ashore and save his own life while leaving his comrade to perish.

Now both officers, several years after, were in command of small cruisers in the Gulf of Mexico.

"From the fisherman's description of the craft that came into the bay, Dean, you think she is the buccaneer brig known as the Rattlesnake?" Captain Dudley had asked, when the two men were seated together smoking their cigars after supper.

"Yes, I got her description pretty thoroughly, and my opinion is that she is the Rattlesnake, and is here hiding somewhere while undergoing repairs.

"I know that she had a brush off Key West a month ago with an English brig, and was seen off Pensacola a week ago, so I believe it is the

Rattlesnake, and she is hiding in the bay while fitting up.

"She is the equal of either one of us in guns and men, and Bertrando her commander is a cunning fellow and perfect sailor, so it would be hard for your vessel or mine alone to corner and capture him."

"But together we can do so?"

"Yes, and thus wipe out a red-handed fiend who has been a terror for years along the Gulf shores and the Atlantic Coast as far north as the Chesapeake, as you know."

"I am with you, Dean, heart, hand and ship."

It was just then that the midshipman announced a visitor.

"Show him into the cabin, Mr. Mercer," was Archer Dean's response, and a moment after Midshipman Mark Mercer returned accompanied by the visitor.

The officers saw a mere youth, clad in sailor costume and pea-jacket, and with a storm hat upon his head.

His clothes were sprinkled with spray and he seemed to have come into the river from the bay, where it was blowing pretty hard.

His hat was tied down under his chin, to keep from losing it, and he did not remove it in the presence of the officers, either from ignorance or intention, they knew not which.

The middy was curious to know what had brought the young sailor aboard the schooner in a blow and a dark, ugly night, and so lingered in the cabin.

He had been on duty on deck when he had discovered a small sail coming up the river and heading straight for the schooner.

Reporting the fact to the officer of the deck, as the little craft drew nearer they saw that it was the intention of its occupant to board the schooner or run very close, so at once sung out the hail:

"Boat ahoy! what boat is that?"

The answer came in a clear, boyish voice:

"A boat from across the bay with news for your captain."

"Ay, ay, come alongside!"

This the helmsman did very skillfully, and Midshipman Mark Mercer who met him at the gangway saw that his boat was a stanch little craft, decked over two-thirds her length and carrying a jib and mainsail.

There was but one person visible in the boat, and if he had crossed the bay in the gale blowing outside he had taken a great risk, and must have a good reason for so doing.

"I wish to see your captain, please," said the young sailor.

"Who shall I tell him desires the honor?" asked the middy, gazing curiously at the youth.

"Say a visitor, only, and one who has news for him."

And thus it was that the young visitor gained entrance to the presence of the commander of the Spiteful and his friend Captain Dudley.

CHAPTER XIV.

A COMPACT.

THE two officers regarded the young visitor curiously, and then the eyes of the lieutenant-commanding fell upon the midshipman.

"You need not wait longer, Mr. Mercer, thank you," said Lieutenant Dean, dryly, and Mark Mercer left the cabin with the remark to himself:

"The lieutenant saw through my little game to learn what that young fellow came aboard for."

"I'm curious, but I can't help it, and that's the way to learn."

"Well, young man, may I ask who it is that you wish to see?" said Lieutenant Dean.

"The commander of this schooner, sir," was the low response.

"Well, you have your wish, for I command the schooner-of-war Spiteful."

The youth bowed but made no reply.

He seemed nervous, now that he was face to face with the one whom he had come to see.

Seeing his embarrassment, Archer Dean said:

"Well, young man, how can I serve you?"

"I have come, sir, to make a report to you, sir, or rather inform you of news I deem important."

"Well, let us hear it."

"I desire, sir, you will allow me to go free as soon as I have told you what I have come to make known to you."

"Ah! you are implicated then in something upon which I can hold you, eh?"

"I am what I am, sir, one who knows a secret which you would give much to learn, and for which I ask nothing more than to go my way to-night, as soon as I have told you all."

"Do you agree to my terms, Lieutenant Archer Dean?"

"Ah! you know me, it seems?"

The youth started and half turned away, but made no reply.

"How is it that you know my name so well, may I ask?"

"I heard that Lieutenant Archer Dean com-

manded the schooner-of-war Spiteful, sir," almost faltered the youth.

"Well, suppose I refuse to make a compact with you?"

"I will not tell you the secret unless you do," was the decided response.

"Indeed! but we have the power here to force men to do our will."

"I am but a boy, sir, but will die before I would yield, unless my terms are agreed to."

"Well, my lad, I do not intend to be severe with you, so name your price."

"I set no price, sir, nor would I receive any."

"What then?"

"I only ask that when I make known my secret, you will allow me to depart at once, and not detain me."

"Why do you ask this?"

"Because much depends upon my return from whence I came before dawn breaks."

"Can you not explain more?"

"No, sir."

"How will I know whether you deceive me or not?"

"You must trust me, sir."

"Who are you?"

"Only a fisher lad."

"Have you not been taught to uncover your head in the presence of your elders?"

"I have been taught to do so, sir; but please do not demand it of me now, for I am not well, and I have to expose myself again to the sea on my return."

"Where do you live?"

"Upon the sea, sir."

"Is that your only home?"

"My vessel, sir."

Both Archer Dean and Captain Dudley were becoming more and more interested in the strange youth.

They realized that he was more than an ordinary fisher lad, and they felt sure that he had some secret of importance to tell.

Was it in revenge that he meant to betray outlaw comrades?

As they could only find out from the boy, the lieutenant turned to the captain and asked:

"Well, Dudley, what do you think of this mysterious youth?"

"I'd make the compact with him which he asks," was the reply.

"That is, hear his secret and allow him to go his way?"

"Yes."

"Suppose his story is a made-up one, and he has just come on board as a spy."

"What harm could he do merely as a spy?"

"He could send us upon some false errand, which would enable his companions to slip out of port and escape while we are gone."

"I had not thought of that, Dean."

"What do you consider the youth to be?"

"Well, he reports himself as a fisher lad."

"True."

"And may be."

"And may not be."

"That is so."

The youth had not spoken during this conversation between the two officers, but his eyes moved quickly from face to face.

He seemed to have become less nervous also, and was outwardly very calm, whatever excitement he might be under inwardly.

"What do you suspect him of being, Dean, may I ask?" Captain Louis Dudley made inquiry, after a pause.

"Well, you know that this coast is infested with outlaws."

"Yes."

"We came in to-night, and the morrow might reveal to us an outlaw craft in port."

"I see."

"So it would be necessary to get the craft out to-night, under cover of the darkness."

"I understand."

"This being the case this youth may, remember I simply suppose a case, have come to tell me a secret, which, when known, might send me off on a wild goose chase, and thus the outlaws could slip out of port meanwhile."

"Does this strike you as reasonable?"

"It certainly does, Dean, and I confess I had not looked at it in that light before."

"Then you decline to form a compact with me, Lieutenant Dean, to hear my secret and then let me go my way unmolested?" asked the youth, and his voice was now very much in earnest.

"Perhaps you can be prevailed upon to tell your story and remain on board until it is verified?"

"Never, sir!"

"Will you not change your mind?"

"I will not, sir."

"Suppose I demand it of you, the penalty of refusal to be the severest punishment?"

"I would die before I would yield, and I see that I made a mistake in trusting to the honor of Lieutenant Dean."

The face of the young officer flushed with anger at this direct hit, and he seemed about to reply warmly; but instantly checked himself in this intention and said in his calm way:

"You made no mistake, my lad, in trusting to the honor of Archer Dean."

"As you came aboard my vessel in good faith and confidence, so shall you leave it, for

I accept the compact, to hear your secret and then to allow you to depart at once."

"Ah sir, I thank you," was the earnest response of the lad, whose whole manner was now changed by the officer's promise to him.

CHAPTER XV.

THE SECRET.

THE young sailor gave a sigh of relief, when Lieutenant Archer Dean gave him to understand that he did not intend to detain him, but would make the compact between them binding.

In spite of the warmth of the cabin he had neither unbuttoned his heavy storm-coat, or untied the kerchief under his chin, which held down the flaps of his tarpaulin.

His face could barely be seen, yet what was visible impressed the two officers with the belief that he was not the common fisher lad he professed to be.

His large, splendid eyes shone with intelligence and their expression was something to feel.

"Well, my lad, have a glass of wine, for you look tired and wet, and a bite also will refresh you."

"Then you can tell us your secret, for this gentleman is Captain Louis Dudley of the brig-of-war Battle Bird, who is doubtless as much interested as I am in what you will have to say."

The youth bowed at what he deemed an introduction, but said in response to the invitation of the lieutenant:

"I thank you, sir, but I am not hungry, and I prefer not to drink wine, for I will have a long and dangerous run back again and it is an ugly night out in the bay."

"And where will you go?"

"To my home, sir."

"You said you had no home."

"My vessel is my home, sir."

"Ah yes; but if you care to remain to-night do so, for I do not wish you to face the dangers of the wind-swept bay unless you desire it."

"It is duty, sir, that demands it, not a desire."

"But are you ready to bear my story?"

"We are, so sit there and tell us all you care to of the cause of your mysterious visit."

The youth bowed but remained standing, and then asked somewhat abruptly:

"Lieutenant Dean, have you ever heard of the Ocean Rapier?"

"Ha! who has not heard of that renowned pirate craft, my lad?"

"I would give my commission to capture the vessel that is so called," Captain Dudley added.

"Well, gentlemen, the Ocean Rapier is in Mobile Bay now."

"Indeed! you know this?"

"I do."

"There is no mistake?"

"None, sir."

"Where is she?"

"Lying in a retreat across the bay upon the eastern shore, within a mile of Old Spanish Fort."

"A good place for hiding certainly, for I cruised up there once; but is her chief with her?"

"Captain Rapier is with his vessel, sir."

"That is fortunate; but what is she doing here?"

"She came here to repair and get provisions, and her yawl is in port to-night, and starts back in the morning."

"When the yawl leaves she will return to the brig, and by following her around into the Spanish River you will catch the Ocean Rapier in a trap from which there is no escape."

"Good-night, gentlemen."

"But hold, my lad, for after the valuable information you have given us you shall not return empty-handed."

"If you intend to pay me gold, sir, I will not receive it."

"Yet you risk your life to come here and put me upon the track of the Ocean Rapier, a craft I would give my right arm to capture."

"I have done only my duty, sir."

"And you refuse payment?"

"Most decidedly, sir."

"My lad, you are not what you profess to be."

"I suppose now, sir, you will keep your part of the compact, and allow me to leave your vessel?" hastily asked the youth.

"I shall keep it, yes; but what is your name?"

"There is nothing in a name, sir, and you would gain nothing by knowing."

"Ah! but let me be the judge of that."

"Call me Nemesis then, sir."

"By Heaven! but you act in this matter from revenge?"

"I do, sir."

"I half-believed it."

"This pirate Rapier has wronged you in some way?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you wish to see him hanged?"

"I wish to see his guilty career come to an end, Lieutenant Dean."

"Now may I depart, sir?"

"You still refuse reward?"

"I do, sir."

"This craft lies at Spanish Fort you say?"

"In an inlet near there, sir."

"There is water enough there for my schooner and Captain Dudley's brig?"

"What does the schooner draw, sir?"

"Eight and a half-feet."

"And the Battle Bird, sir?"

"Nine feet."

"That is the draught of the Ocean Rapier."

"And her armament?"

"She carries ten guns, five to a broadside, and two heavy pivots, one forward and the other aft."

"Her crew number about eighty men, I suppose?"

"One hundred, sir, and they are trained to fight, and are, hence, dangerous foes."

"Thank you, my lad; but the yawl is in port now?"

"Yes, sir, receiving provisions."

"Well, you are at liberty to go when you please, though I would pay you a handsome sum to act as my pilot."

"It cannot be, sir, for I have done my duty in bringing you the news that the Ocean Rapier is in the bay."

"Good-night, gentlemen."

"Good night, my lad; but I will see you on your way."

"And I will accompany you also to the deck," said Captain Dudley.

The youth bowed and turned from the cabin, and the two officers went on deck with him.

His boat was alongside, under the schooner's lee, which, as the wind came from the westward was protected by the land, so the force of the gale was not so severely felt in the river, the stern also breaking its force.

The two officers gazed over at the little boat, towing alongside, upon the waves in the river, and Lieutenant Dean asked:

"Did you come alone, my lad?"

"Yes, sir."

"You are a good sailor to take chances in your boat on such a night."

"I told you, sir, I lived on the sea."

"But you are not going out of the river to-night, surely?"

"Yes, sir."

"I am half inclined to detain you, for it is blowing a gale outside."

"The punta will stand it, sir, and once I get out of the river, I'll head dead before the gale and can run under my jib alone if it gets too stiff for me to carry my mainsail."

"Good-night, gentlemen," and springing into his little boat the strange boy called to the sailor holding the painter:

"Cast off, my man!"

CHAPTER XVI.

TOO LATE.

THE sailor obeyed, the painter was cast loose and the little boat went off from the schooner's side like a bird, once her mainsail caught the breeze.

She soon disappeared from sight, going down the river at a swift pace, and turning to his host Captain Dudley said:

"Did you note the manner in which that boy gave the order to your man to cast off, Dean?"

"It had a very officer-like ring to it, the order had, if that is what you mean, Dudley."

"That is just it, and I would vow the fellow had been trained on board a man-of-war."

"Ah! now I begin to see your reasoning, and somewhere I have heard that Captain Rapier, the Rover, carries a woman on board his vessel as a safeguard."

"Yes, and my men assert that he will never be taken as long as she sails on board his vessel."

"Whether our visitor was a woman, the one in question from the Ocean Rapier, I do not know; but the more I recall the pretended youth, the more thoroughly am I convinced that it was a woman, not a boy."

"And I am inclining to your belief; but now, what is to be done?"

"Capture this pirate, of course."

"Well, if I can aid you, command me."

"You can, and more, without your aid I could not accomplish it."

"How will you go about it, Dean?"

"I shall send men ashore to look up the yawl and her crew, and be all ready to follow the boat out, if she sails to-night."

"You can be ready also, and we can sail together, chase the yawl to the retreat of the brig, and capture her and her crew."

"There must be no mistake."

"I am with you heart and hand, Dean," said Captain Dudley, and after arranging a few more preliminaries, he went on deck and was rowed aboard his own vessel.

The gale blew itself out by dawn, settling down to a stiff breeze, and the vessels rode at single anchor, ready to sail at a moment's notice.

The yawl had been found, but in spite of all watchfulness the crew had slipped away in the darkness, and now all eyes were straining to find her as the day dawned.

At last, just after sunrise, she was sighted standing away across the bay, and crowding on all sail, in rapid flight.

Lieutenant Dean went aloft with his glass, and took a close look at her.

He saw that she was loaded deep, carried half a dozen men, and had four oars out in addition to her sail.

She was on a course that must carry her to the vicinity of Spanish Fort.

Of course it was the yawl from the Ocean Rapier, which his strange visitor had referred to.

Again, if it was the yawl, and it was heading for Spanish Fort, that meant that the outlaw craft was still in hiding there.

There was but one thing to do, and that was to signal to the Battle Bird that the yawl was visible, flying toward Spanish Fort, and the Spiteful meant to at once give chase.

The answer came promptly from the brig:

"Ay, ay, I am ready, so lead off!"

Ten minutes after the two beautiful vessels were under a pressure of canvas running down the river.

Their commanders understood that the yawl could go where they could not, and that they would have to stand considerably below the mouth of the river ere they could head across, as the shoals and bars from the marshes would not allow of their going within a league as far up as the yawl had done.

The yawl had gotten well over toward the other shore by the time the schooner and brig were well under way, and a lookout aloft had reported that he had seen signaling from the boat to some one on the other shore.

As the two vessels-of-war left the river they beheld the tall spars and sails of a brig float into view four leagues away, the white canvas standing out in bold relief against the densely-wooded hills of the eastern shore.

A cheer came from the crew of the schooner and was answered by the men of the Battle Bird, who also saw the strange vessel.

There was the craft which the mysterious visitor of the night before had reported as being in hiding near Spanish Fort.

The yawl had warned her of danger, and she was hastening to fly to sea for safety.

But, then, every officer and man took in the situation, and it seemed as though the war vessels and the stranger, sailing down the bay toward a given point, the two on the western shore, the one on the eastern, must come out within easy musket-range of each other.

The two cruisers were fast, very fast their crews knew them to be, and it was not expected that the stranger possessed speed so great as to enable her to drop them well astern when she rounded into the main ship channel for the run straight out to the Gulf.

But the speed of the stranger did do just this, and the two cruisers aimed too late to get her under their broadside guns.

CHAPTER XVII.

A STRANGE FOE.

THE run down the harbor and bay has been seen, the great speed of the brig, whatever she might be, enabling her to pick up the boat coming off from Red Cliffs, and also to get out ahead of the cruisers when she turned into the main ship channel to the Gulf.

When they saw that they were to come out well astern, the two commanders of the cruisers began to open fire, and their first shots brought

no response from the stranger, nor did they cause her to show her colors.

Captain Dudley had gone on board the schooner at sailing from the river, to be on hand in case they had to hold a consultation as to what was best to be done, so that all he had to do, in giving an order to the lieutenant commanding the Battle Bird in his stead, was to signal him.

The two friends stood together, therefore, upon the quarter-deck of the Spiteful, glasses in hand, and watching with the deepest interest their chase of the strange craft, which, whatever its career might be, was certainly most anxious to run away from two foes that appeared to be, singly, a match for her.

"Well, Dean, it seems he neither shows inclination to come to or run up his colors at our fire," said Captain Dudley, after watching the effect of their double fire upon the fugitive brig.

"And what appears still more strange to me, Dudley, is his not responding to our fire," answered Archer Dean.

"True, he has not hit back at us, that is certain."

"Can you guess why?"

"I confess I cannot."

"Nor I, though both your fire and mine have hit him hard."

"He is a mystery to me, I confess."

"I only wish we could, by a lucky shot, dismast him."

"So do I."

But wishing to dismast the stranger was not doing it, and the two friends could only watch the effects of their fire and still hope for better results.

At last Archer Dean, who had been watching the strange brig very closely through his glass, said:

"Do you know that there is perfect discipline on yonder craft?"

"There appears to be."

"The crew are uniformed, and if she were a United States cruiser she could not be in better trim or appear to better advantage than she does."

"I have noticed that, for though possessing the rakish look of a pirate, she yet is as shipshape as a frigate."

"And sails like the wind."

"Yes, she sails wonderfully well, or she could never creep away from the Battle Bird and Spiteful as she does."

"Well, we must overhaul her, that is all, and make the closer acquaintance of her captain."

"Yes, if we can; but she is gaining."

"True, and our only chance is to cripple her."

Then some time longer passed, and it was seen that the fugitive brig was still gaining on the pursuers.

She ran on in silence, paying no attention to the fire of her foes, though it harmed her now and then considerably.

At last, to the surprise of all on the two pursuers, up to her peak went a ball of bunting, which when shaken out revealed the eagle and serpent flag of Mexico.

Captain Dudley looked at Lieutenant Dean, and the latter returned the look with the reflection of the expression upon his friend's face upon his own.

He did not speak at first, but the look questioned closely:

"Have we made a mistake?"

Then they talked it over, and it was recalled that a Mexican brig-of-war had often been mistaken for the buccaneer craft Ocean Rapier.

Mexico's navy was small, and its cruisers were seldom seen away from the coast of the country; but then, they had been met with far away occasionally.

If this was a Mexican cruiser, and she had wished to make repairs and get provisions, why had she not boldly entered the port of Mobile and done so, for the two countries were not unfriendly.

One of the officers of the schooner then mentioned the fact to his commander that several of the Mexican cruisers were in the habit of doing lawless acts at sea, almost bordering upon piracy, and that they had been marked by the vessels of other nations as fair game if caught in such acts.

"There is a Mexican brig answering the appearance of yonder craft, sir, and known as the Red Rapier, whose commander has had trouble time and again with his Government on account of his lawless acts."

"He does not commit any act of piracy, it is said, where a single proof can be found to condemn him, and boldly asserts that pirate vessels assume his name and thus the charge is laid upon him."

"He was once tried by his Government, sir, but no proof was found that he had done a lawless act, so he was, while under suspicion, simply put upon leave and his vessel taken from him."

"The Government is poor, as you know, Lieutenant Dean, and so, when a few months after, this officer appeared with a fine new brig, fully armed, and manned by his own crew, which he offered to present to the navy of Mexico if he was again allowed to serve his country at sea,

the request was at once granted, so again he was afloat, to sail the seas and do as he pleased.

"That brig is the very counterpart of the one I saw him come into Vera Cruz with a year ago and present to the Government, and he had not been three months at sea before rumors were about that the Red Rapier was overhauling vessels at sea which she had no authority to do."

"But to prove it was the trouble."

The officer who had made this explanation regarding the strange cruiser, was entitled to consideration.

He had been sent to Mexico by the United States Government upon special business which had detained him in that country for over a year, and thus he had gained much experience of what was going on there.

His name was Lawton Leslie, and he was the senior lieutenant of the Spiteful, and a capable and brave officer, respected by Archer Dean and all others.

Both Captain Dudley and Archer Dean listened to his story of the lawless Mexican brig with considerable interest, and then the latter remarked:

"Well, Leslie, that is either the Ocean Rapier, buccaneer, or the Red Rapier, the Mexican cruiser."

"She is in American waters, and he shall be made to show that he is an honest cruiser if he can do so."

"Now keep up a hot fire upon him until he comes to or fights!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

UNDER MANY FLAGS.

IT was an acknowledged fact that the strange brig was a mystery, which no one could fathom.

She held on under her Mexican flag, receiving the fire of both the Battle Bird and the Spiteful in silence, for not once did she answer back with her guns.

As a shot from the schooner seemed to stagger her, her colors came down from the peak almost instantly.

Did it mean a surrender?

If so, why did she not come to?

Then up to the peak went another ball of bunting, which, when shaken out, revealed the broad flag of Spain.

The two friends gazed at each other once more in amazement.

The United States and Spain were on friendly terms, and here was a cruiser showing the Spanish flag.

Would the lieutenant commander of the schooner fire on the ensign of Spain?

The crew wondered if he would, and all eyes turned upon him.

But he did not leave them long in doubt, for he called out:

"Why have you ceased firing at that forward gun?"

"Open again, and unless she comes to, blow her out of the water if you can."

The Battle Bird's gunner had also ceased firing, but began again at a signal from his captain on the Spiteful's deck, and once more the shots fell thick and fast about the fugitive vessel, which now and then were seen to strike, damaging vessel or injuring crew more or less.

The third time a shot struck her, after hoisting her Spanish colors, they came down on a run, and once more it was thought that she would surrender.

But no, for up to the peak came another flag.

This time it was the tri-color of France.

This was more puzzling still, and the order was given to cease firing until the two commanders could talk it over.

The consultation was a short one and the decision adverse to the brig, for the firing was begun again.

The fugitive craft was now nearing the pass out into the Gulf.

There was a bar to cross, and as the tide was out, and the depth would be but some thirteen or fourteen feet, she would hardly, with her draught, attempt to run out without shortening sail, all through.

The fugitive had been steadily gaining upon the two cruisers, notwithstanding her hard knocks from them, and thereupon the American vessels felt very sure that once she gained the deep waters of the Gulf of Mexico, she could drop them astern more rapidly, unless she was crippled before gaining an offing.

Then night would come on, and as the wind threatened to remain strong, if not increase, there were chances for the mysterious vessel to escape after all.

To prevent what all felt would be so dire a calamity for them, the two commanders ordered the gunners to fire more deliberately, and take the best aim possible, while they were to devote themselves to trying to cripple the brig in her rigging.

Could they bring down a mast they would have matters all their own way.

So when the firing was begun against the tri-color of France, the crews of the pursuers saw the French flag hauled down immediately.

But it was not a surrender!

The brig still held on her way as before.

Then, after a lapse of some minutes, they saw the peak halyards again running up a ball of bunting.

What would it be this time all wondered?

They had not long to wait, for out fluttered the red ensign of Great Britain.

Again there was surprise upon the cruisers.

After all could it be that they had been pursuing an English vessel-of-war?

They ordered the firing to cease as before, and once more the two commanders talked over the situation.

It was about all that they could do.

They had not captured, crippled or brought the fugitive brig to.

Neither could they keep up with the pace that she set them, and within a short while more, if not hard hit, she would be dashing out to sea to bid them defiance.

"What do you think now, Dean?" asked Captain Dudley.

"She has been flirting with her colors, but I am in deadly earnest with her, so shall not cease firing again, no matter what colors she flies next time," was the answer.

Then the voice of the lieutenant was heard commanding the gunners to open fire once more.

The brig was quick also in following the example of the schooner, and her first shot cut the halyards of the flag on the fugitive and down came the British ensign on a run and wafted by the wind floated out upon the sea to settle down there and disappear.

Both crews cheered and all eyes watched the next move of the mysterious vessel.

They were not kept long in suspense, for another balyard was quickly rove and up went a flag, which when spread to the breeze revealed the Stars and Stripes.

In spite of his determination not to do so, as this flag, the flag of his country, was revealed, Lieutenant Dean quickly ordered:

"Cease firing!"

The brig's pivot gun also ceased firing, and Captain Dudley said:

"Well, Dean, what does that signify?"

"No more, I guess, than did the other flags."

"Will you fire upon her now?"

"I dislike to fire upon my own flag; but then she cannot be an American, for if she was she would come to."

"Fire over her several times as a hint to do so."

This advice of Captain Dudley was followed, and a solid shot was sent far over the deck of the fugitive.

Another and another shot followed, but with not the slightest effect as far as bringing the brig to was concerned.

"I say, Captain Dudley?"

"Yes, Dean."

"Within five minutes more she will be across the bar."

"Yes, for she is nearing it rapidly."

"Once she crosses she will outfoot us quickly, the way she sails."

"Yes, she sails like a witch."

"My idea is to give her my starboard broadside, and you follow with your port."

"Then I will let her have my port broadside, the Battle Bird giving her her starboard."

"This will pour upon her a quick and terrible fire of over twenty guns, and some shots must cripple her surely."

"The very idea, and we will lose no time about it," and Captain Dudley hastily hailed his vessel.

CHAPTER XIX.

STILL A MYSTERY.

UNMINDFUL of the new plan to bring her to, the mysterious brig held on her way as serenely as before, the American flag still flying above her decks.

She was now under the shadows of the high point upon which stands to-day old Fort Morgan, with Dauphin Island lying off her starboard beam.

The channel ran close in to the eastern shore, and the bar was just beyond, and once over it the blue waters of the Gulf of Mexico, now lashed into foam by the half gale that was blowing, stretched away for hundreds of leagues, inviting safety to the craft, whatever she might be, that had so daringly run the desperate gauntlet of fire from her pursuing foes.

Once tossing upon the Gulf, with many a fathom of deep water beneath her keel, the brig could fly away to disappear in the gathering gloom of night.

"Ahoy the Battle Bird!" called out Captain Dudley, for the brig was sailing beam and beam with the schooner and within easy hauling distance.

"Ay, ay, sir," responded the officer of the deck on board the Battle Bird.

"It is Lieutenant Dean's intention to try broadsides upon the chase, and the brig will do the same."

"Stand by to follow, broadside for broadside, from the schooner."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"You understand fully?"

"Yes, sir," came the answer, and the order was given by the officer to the crew.

Then Lieutenant Dean sent the men to quarters,

the guns were cleared for action, and at his command the schooner wore around until she brought her port broadside to bear upon the fugitive vessel.

Instantly, as she became steady, Archer Dean called out:

"Fire!"

The guns burst forth with mighty roar, and as the schooner swung back upon her course the Battle Bird let fly her starboard broadside rapidly.

Hardly had the rumble of the guns died away when the Spiteful had changed her course so as to deliver her starboard broadside, and viciously the guns rung out.

Almost immediately following, the Battle Bird delivered her starboard battery, and then the two cruisers held on their course as before.

They were running now before the wind and the heavy clouds of smoke from their guns floated down astern of the fugitive brig in her wake, wholly hiding her from view.

All had heard the cracking of timbers as shot struck the fugitive craft, and there were some sharp cries, Spanish oaths and then stern commands.

Then all was silent once more, and what damage had been done could not be seen from on board the cruisers until the smoke of firing had passed on over the brig.

All waited anxiously for the passing of the cloud, and soon it did so.

Was the fugitive brig to be found a wreck?

Had she been sunk?

Would she surrender now?

Such were the thoughts in many minds on both the pursuing vessels.

At last the clouds of smoke swept on, the dim outline of the brig was seen, then it became very distinct until she appeared in bold relief once more.

She had not been wrecked, was the answer to one question.

She did not appear to be sinking, answered another.

She had not surrendered, that was certain.

She still held on as before, with no apparent thought upon the part of her captain of coming to at the savage demand for him to do so.

But the chase had not escaped unscathed, for her foretopmast had been shot away, her sails were torn with shot, and more canvas hung limp and useless across the main yard.

Then her decks seemed to have been cruelly swept by the iron hail.

Of course her speed had slackened with the loss of some of her sails, yet she still held gamely on.

She was now abeam of the old fort, and was crossing the bar.

Her rigging was full of men removing the wreckage and repairing damages and she seemed as determined as ever to hold on in her flight.

"I say that craft bears a charmed life, Dean," said Captain Dudley with admiration in his tone.

"She certainly bears a daring and skillful commander upon her deck," was Archer Dean's answer.

"And will escape us I fear."

"I will give her more of our broadsides, Dudley, for she cannot escape another round certainly."

"Her flag is down."

"So it is; but that does not mean surrender, as we have seen before."

"No, it means to show us another ensign, I should say, judging from the past."

"Well, will you give her your broadsides at once, for she is in the Gulf now?"

"Yes, I will give the order to—"

"One moment, Dean," quickly interposed Captain Dudley.

"Well?" and Archer Dean was surprised at the earnest manner of his friend.

"Turn your glass upon the stern of yonder brig."

Lieutenant Dean did so.

"There, standing by the flag halyards, what do you see?"

"I see a woman on the pirate's deck, and, as I live, she is hoisting the flag with her own hands," cried the lieutenant.

"You are right. It is a woman. You cannot give the order now to fire upon her."

"We have done so before."

"You did not then know that a woman was on board."

"True, and now that I see her more distinctly she has been there all the while, only I mistook her for a youth."

"And standing by her side is a little boy."

"You are right; and see! an officer approaches her."

"It is without doubt the chief."

"Yes; we see them more distinctly now, with our glasses, as the loss of her canvas has enabled us to gain rapidly."

"Yes, but there goes other canvas up now, and they have rigged a new foretopmast, and bent on a sail already. Those sea cats work well indeed."

"You are right, and she feels the pressure of her extra canvas again, for she is leaving us once more."

"And I dare not fire a broadside now, seeing a woman and a child upon her decks."

"No, it must not be."

"But see! The woman is raising the flag to the peak," and the eyes of the two officers eagerly watched the result.

CHAPTER XX.

TWO BROADSIDES.

THE presence of a woman and child on board the strange vessel they were so persistently chasing put the two American commanders upon their mettle as gentlemen.

They had heard of the Buccaneer Ocean Rapier carrying a lady on board for good-fortune, and yet, though she too might be an outlaw, they would not feel like grining upon the craft to do her harm.

And the child's presence aboard was another mystery to them, and a drawback, for it was another reason for the guns of the cruisers not being turned upon the fugitive vessel.

Lieutenant Lawton Leslie still stuck to his belief that the craft they were in chase of was the Red Rapier, sailing as a Mexican cruiser, whatever her recent acts of lawlessness might be.

He had seen the brig in Vera Cruz, had gone on board of her to dine with a Mexican lieutenant, and said to his commander that he could not be mistaken in her.

But all were watching now, by the last rays of the setting sun, the woman and child standing upon the quarter-deck of the flying craft.

Many asserted now that they had seen the woman before, that she had been on deck all along during the fire, seated there near the taffrail, and this fact had led them to believe that she was an officer who had been wounded. There she now stood with the flag-halyards in her hand, and a roll of bunting had been run up, but not shaken out.

By her side stood the child, and near her, with his arms folded upon his breast, dressed in full uniform and calmly regarding his pursuers, was the captain who had defied pursuit.

The cutting away of some of the sails and spars of the brig had so retarded her flight for a while, that the two cruisers had crept up on her until they were less than a mile away.

In less than half an hour more darkness would be upon the sea.

In five minutes more the fugitive brig would have the land astern of her, and have gained an offing in the Gulf.

Would she escape after all?

Would her pursuers be able to follow her in the darkness and still hold their own? were questions that excited the crews just then.

The woman seemed also to be watching the cruisers, and waiting for a command, ere she shook out the flag.

The brig had repaired damages with wonderful celerity and pluck, and now had her canvas spread once more.

The effect was soon evident in her increased speed.

The wind was blowing almost fiercely now, but she stood up well under it, in spite of her vast spread of canvas.

There was plenty of water beneath her keel, and this sent her along, while her pursuers were still in the shallow bay and narrow channel.

"She is going to shake out the flag, Dean," cried Captain Dudley, who had kept his glass constantly at his eye.

He had seen the brig's commander step nearer to the woman and appear to give her an order.

"I wonder what nationality she will claim to have this time?" was Dean's inquiry.

"She has run the gamut of Mexico, France, Spain, England and America, so I am curious also to know what colors she will next hoist," Captain Dudley remarked.

The words were followed quickly by the shaking out of the ball of bunting at the peak of the fugitive brig.

"Behold them!" cried Lieutenant Dean.

Every eye was strained, and as the wind caught the folds and spread them out flat with a sharp snap, the last rays of the sun fell full upon the flag of the fugitive brig, revealing a black field, in the center of which was a red rapier.

"The Red Rapier as I said!" exultantly cried Lieutenant Leslie.

All had expected to behold a national flag of some kind. The men had wagered that it would be a Dutch flag, Portuguese, or the colors of some of the countries of South America, but that it would be a black flag not one had believed.

The strange vessel had fled in silence, not hitting back once at her pursuers.

This did not appear like the work of a pirate, but now, when she had reached the open waters of the Gulf, she unfurled a black ensign of piracy!

And more, in the center of it was the red rapier, showing that she was the craft so called.

But was the vessel known to be an outlaw, and called the Ocean Rapier, the same as the one that now showed her colors so plainly?

Was there a brig known as the Ocean Rapier and one also called the Red Rapier.

This question could not be answered, but it was asked again and again.

Lawton Leslie had been right in his surmise about the craft; but the Mexican cruiser, was she a pirate out and out?

A woman had run up her corsair colors, that was certain; and the woman and a child had remained on deck in all the fierce fire poured upon her.

But the crews of the two cruisers had not very long for conjecture, for they saw that the brig intended some move.

Suddenly she swept around until her starboard broadside bore upon the schooner; then the tall, uniformed man upon her quarter-deck was seen to wave his sword, and, quick as a flash, the starboard guns, aided by the two pivots mounted fore and aft, belched forth their terrific hail, and they were aimed at the schooner.

The cruiser was caught by surprise; and more—she was hard hit, for a gun was dismounted, the forecastle bow chaser which had been so merciless in its fire upon the stranger, and half a dozen of the crew went down dead and wounded.

Then, too, her foretopmast was shot away, and her anchor, hanging at the bows, had been cut loose, and the cable running out brought her up with a sudden shock.

Without waiting to see the effect of her fire upon the schooner the strange brig had swept about again and now gave the Battle Bird her port broadside.

This, too, hit hard, for the brig's mainyard was shot away, the bowsprit was cut off close, two broadside guns were dismounted, and her loss was heavier in men killed and wounded than had been the Spiteful's.

So on, leaving wreck and death behind her by her two terrible broadsides, sailed the strange brig out into the gloom of night falling upon the Gulf.

CHAPTER XXI.

AT HER COMMAND.

I WILL now return on board the strange brig, where a change had come, as the reader has seen, to cause her to fire upon the two pursuing vessels, after Lucille's determined stand that it should not be done.

Captain Revello had yielded gracefully to the demand of his wife, held by his pledge to do so, and the brig had sped on her way under the fire of the Battle Bird and the Spiteful.

Of course the schooner suffered, for a man would be killed here, another wounded there, a sail torn or a spar shattered, and there was danger constantly of still greater damage being done.

Through the chase and fearless of the fire, Mrs. Revello remained on deck, little Reginald held near to her, so as to protect him by her own body, but this she kept from the child.

The crew had seen their Lady of Luck under fire before, but they could not but regard her now with the greatest admiration, for she never flinched or changed an expression when the iron messengers would strike the deck, or rigging.

Reginald, too, was as cool as his father, whose dignified and fearless manner the little fellow aped perfectly.

Boy though he was of tender years, he knew the danger as he saw men shot to pieces about him, and beheld the horrors of an iron shot striking the vessel.

The position of the fugitive vessel became more and more critical as she sped seaward.

Captain Revello had no pilot, and was running out of the bay upon his own and Officer Estal's knowledge of the waters.

Should they ground their doom was sealed.

Should a shot dismst them it would be the same thing, unless Revello fought his foes and could beat them off.

The beautiful wife of Revello showed no sign of anxiety, but simply took in the situation as it was.

Nothing escaped her keen vision, and she seemed to comprehend all as thoroughly as did her sailor-husband.

The hoisting of one flag after the other was done in the hope of checking the fire, at least temporarily.

It was successful for awhile, after the raising of each nation's colors, and all the while the brig was nearing the Gulf.

That the flags would be fired upon, after being raised, to force them to bring the brig to as the craft of a friendly nation in American waters, Captain Revello was assured; but, it at least gained for him a cessation of the firing for a few minutes, and so it was that flag after flag was sent up to the peak, and then lowered, to give place to another.

At last Lucille Revello began to exhibit some nervousness, as she saw that nothing protected the vessel from the merciless firing of her pursuers.

"Revello!"

Her husband heard her call, and at once went to her side.

"Well, Lucille!" he demanded, betraying not a trace of anxiety.

"I am an American, and I have a right to hoist the flag of my country over me."

"Yes."

Send for the Stars and Stripes and I will run them up to the peak."

"I will do as you wish, Lucille, but it will do no good."

"You think so?"

"I know so."

"We shall see," was her answer.

The American flag was sent for, and soon made fast to the halyards; then it was run up to the peak and shaken out.

Such a long while passed ere it was fired upon that Lucille began to feel very jubilant; but, at last, came the shots, but they were thrown over and not aimed at the vessel.

Of course the brig held on, and seeing that no attention was paid the demand for her to come to, the brig and schooner both fired at her.

What the result would have been no one could tell, but certain it was that the sailor's wife grew more and more nervous under the fire of the pursuers.

She did not fear for herself, but for her little boy, who several times had barely escaped death by the merest accident.

At last a shot came tearing along after the brig; it cut down an officer who held the hand of little Reginald, the boy being dragged to the deck by the death-grip of the one who fell.

Instantly Mrs. Revello sprang toward him with a startled cry, and then came the broadsides of the pursuers—one, two, three, four—relentless, terrible broadsides.

The crashing of timbers, the death-cries of strong men, the groans of wounded, and fluttering of sails cut away and torn, followed, while above all came a cry in childlike accents:

"Oh, mamma! they have hit me, too!"

It was little Reginald's voice, and he lay among a heap of wounded and dead men, whither he had been hurled by the terrible rain of iron.

He held up his little hands, tried to stagger to his feet, and his mother, seeing his head bleeding, threw herself upon him with a cry of terror, anguish and rage commingled.

He sank into her arms unconscious, then, and as she rushed for the cabin companionway with him in her grasp, the mother's heart was a-cursed and she cried fiercely:

"They have killed my boy, Revello! Beat them off, and avenge him!"

A cheer came from the crew at the words of the woman, thereby relieving their pent-up emotion, for they had suffered in silence, had been under a fire they dared not return against the will of the Lady of Luck.

An expression of deep pain flashed over the face of Revello as he saw his boy go down, for he was his idol.

But he was a man who knew his duty, and he uttered no word, showed no other sign of emotion than he had when one of his crew had fallen.

He saw his wife take the boy to the cabin, and heard her fiercely-uttered words.

Then he sent the brig's surgeon to her, and devoted his every energy to saving his vessel.

Sad havoc had been played with his vessel, sails, spars and crew.

But no vital spot had been hit in hull or rig, and the gallant and graceful craft still held on her way toward the Gulf.

CHAPTER XXII.

TO AVENGE.

REVELLO was as calm now as though no danger threatened.

He believed that his boy was mortally wounded, and he saw that his vessel was in a bad way.

But the Lady of Luck had broken through her resolve not to allow a blow to be struck against the flag of her country, and her own words had been to avenge her son, to beat off their foes.

The first duty of Revello was to save his vessel.

His voice rung like a trumpet as he sent men aloft to repair damages to spars and sails, and others were put to clearing the decks.

The dead were gotten out of the way, the wounded sent below, the sails trimmed to get the best out of them that could be done, and the vessel was held unwaveringly upon her course once more.

When all was ready, and not until then, Revello began to prepare to hit back, to avenge.

He saw that, barring a more fatal fire, his brig would get out to the Gulf in spite of her pursuers.

He felt that the run had been accomplished in a way that made it a victory for him, rather than a defeat.

The Gulf was at hand, the breeze blowing so hard that his vessel was driving along at a twelve-knot pace, and the shores on the port beam seemed fairly to be flying by as the brig rushed along in her rapid flight.

His wife had said:

"Beat them off!"

He meant to do so.

Just then Lucille came on deck.

Her face was white and hard set.

Her eyes sunken and yet ablaze with the fury that was raging in her heart.

But outwardly she was perfectly calm.

"Lucille, we will escape them."

"We must," she said in a tone that was stern and determined.

"How is our boy?"

"The surgeon cannot yet tell, for he is unconscious. Should he return to consciousness there is hope."

"If not he must die!" and Revello spoke in a low, softened voice.

"Yes."

She uttered the one word fiercely.

Then she gazed astern at the pursuers.

She turned her glass upon them and regarded first one, then the other attentively.

Next she looked at the peak of her own vessel.

The flag was not there.

It had been shot away by the broadsides of the pursuers.

Then she sank in a seat placed for her by Officer Estal.

She seemed to suddenly grow weak and the pallor of her face deepened.

So she sat for a few minutes, watching the coming vessels.

At last she called her husband.

"Revello?"

"Yes, Lucille."

"They did not respect the American flag?"

"I should think not," was the grim reply.

"Why?"

"They believe this to be a pirate brig and are determined to capture her."

"But will fail."

"I hope so."

"Is there any doubt of it?"

"Indeed there is."

"You fear we may be taken?"

"I hope not, sincerely, but the chances are that we may."

"Why?"

"There are two vessels, either one of which is our equal in guns and men."

"Well?"

"They are remarkably speedy, as you see."

"Yes."

"They have not lost a man or been hurt by a shot."

"I understand."

"We have been under an almost constant and damaging fire."

"That is evident."

"Yes, half a dozen of our men are dead, treble that number wounded, and all our repairs at Spanish Fort go for naught, as our vessel has been roughly handled."

"Then, too, we are not yet out of range, and if they attempt the same maneuver again, of firing broadsides, you may be sure it will pretty nearly finish us, if not quite do so."

"You believe that they will fire broadsides again?"

"Why not?"

"It was shown to be their most destructive way of firing upon us, and I notice that the crews are still at quarters, and they do not intend to allow us to escape if they can prevent it."

The woman started and asked somewhat anxiously:

"Do you think their broadsides would sink us if fired again?"

"It will be a miracle if they do not cripple us so we cannot get out to sea."

"And my poor baby boy might be killed, even if not fatally wounded now?"

"How could he escape, Lucille, with the iron tornado rushing into the stern ports which they will pour upon us, and we are much nearer now than before?"

Again the woman started and just then the surgeon appeared upon the deck, coming from the cabin companionway, where he had been bending over the wounded child.

"My child! my boy!"

"For the love of Heaven do not tell me he is dead!" cried the woman, the mother's heart in her bosom now forcing her to show her weakness.

"Senora, your boy will live," came the response of the surgeon.

"Heaven above, I thank Thee!" and the woman dropped upon her knees, clasping her hands above her head and with her face turned upward in prayer.

"Lucille, they are preparing for another broadside," and with the words Revello raised his wife from the deck and pointed to the two pursuers.

"They will kill my boy, and the surgeon has just said that he is not now mortally wounded and will live."

"Quick! Revello, do not let them kill our boy, our idol!" she pleaded.

"Shall I fire upon them?" he asked with sudden vehemance and with a fierce light flashing into his eyes.

"Yes, oh yes!"

"Do not let them kill our boy!"

"Under what flag shall I fire to protect him, Lucille?" sternly asked the man.

"Under the Red Rapier flag."

"Quick! let me have it and I will run it up to the peak with my own hands," she eagerly cried, and Officer Estal sprung to her side with the black roll of bunting in his hands, while Lucille said:

"This to avenge my boy!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

AT SEA.

THE black roll of bunting went up to the peak of the mysterious brig, drawn there by the hands of Lucille, the Lady of Luck.

It was shaken out, revealing, as has been seen, the sable field with the Red Rapier in the center.

Could this mean that the brig had at last shown her true colors?

Could it be that this mysterious craft with a beautiful woman and her child apparently willingly on board, was a buccaneer?

Was it possible that the vessel was none other than the lawless rover known as the Ocean Rapier?

Whatever she was, the one who had before prevented her guns from being turned against American cruisers now demanded that they should be.

She soon hoisted this flag, acknowledged by no nation on the earth.

When the Red Rapier flag had been run up, then Lucille awaited breathlessly for the result.

Would the two cruisers fire upon them again ere the brig could hit back?

She feared that they would, and yet she saw that Revello was in deadly earnest now to strike a telling blow.

Lieutenant Estal seemed also as determined as his captain, and the crew had rushed to quarters as one man.

Then came the command to use the guns, and the brig poured in her terrible fire.

Her gunners were trained well, cool and able marksmen, and they sent their iron shot where they intended they should strike.

A cheer burst from them as they marked the effects of their first fire, and another wild burst came forth with a roar when they beheld both the schooner and the brig no longer able to pursue at a speed they had reason to fear, or to open a fire that would do them much harm.

The captain watched the result with a smile of grim satisfaction upon his dark face, and his wife had seen the effects of the fire with an expression which it was hard to fathom.

The moment she saw first one and then the other cruiser out of the chase, for a while at least, she had hastened to the cabin.

Her boy was safe for the present, no longer to dread another withering broadside from the Spiteful or the Battle Bird.

The surgeon was there, seated by the side of a lounge upon which lay the little sufferer.

His wound in the head had been skillfully dressed by the surgeon, and another, from a splinter in the shoulder also.

The boy was awake and conscious, and seeing his mother, had said, with evident pride that he was a sufferer:

"Oh, mamma! I am wounded just like a big man."

"See!"

"Yes, my darling boy, I do see, and I only wish that I could bear your wounds for you."

"But, do you suffer much, my boy?"

"It hurts, but then I don't mind it, and you mustn't, mamma, dear."

"But where are the brig and schooner?"

"Out of the chase, my boy, and we are safe in the Gulf now; but you must not talk now, or it will make you worse."

The boy resignedly obeyed, and the mother turned to the surgeon and asked:

"Is there no danger, senor?"

"None, I think, senora, for the splinter did not penetrate as deep as I at first feared, and the bone is not involved in the wound on the head."

"He will soon rally out of this."

"I earnestly pray that he will, for now, senor, he is all that I have in the world to love."

"My God! is Captain Revello slain?" cried the surgeon, excitedly, not comprehending her words as they were said.

Her face flushed at his question, and she said, quickly:

"No, no! oh, no! I mean that my boy is the only one who holds the same blood in his veins that I do, since my mother and father are both dead."

"No, Captain Revello is not injured in the slightest, senor, and you may go now to see after the wounded who need your services, and I thank you so much for your goodness to my boy."

She held out her hand, and bending low over it the surgeon took his leave and returned to the deck, while he muttered to himself.

"Can it be possible that she does not love her husband after all?"

"Can it be that it was a slip of her tongue that told the truth?"

"If it is so, then it is Antoine Estal who has won her love, and I hate him the more, for I love her madly, and some day—well, I will not breathe my hopes even for the air to whisper them into other ears," and Juan Sandez, surgeon of the brig, stepped up to Captain Revello and said:

"I have the pleasure of reporting, Senor Captain, that your son is in no danger, though twice wounded."

"I thank you, Senor Sandez, for I feel that

it is your skill that has saved him, for the boy was, I feared, fatally hurt.

"I shall not forget you, Sandez," and the surgeon noted a quiver in the voice of the stern, strong man.

"My services were nothing, Captain Revello, for the wounds were slight, though ugly looking until examined," and the surgeon walked forward to see after the wounded men, while he mused to himself:

"That man bears a charmed life, and Estal seems blessed in the same way."

"Two between me and the goal I seek to reach; but what is a human life, to me?"

Darkness had now fallen upon the Gulf, and the brig was sailing swiftly along, her crew aloft and upon the deck repairing the damages she had sustained.

Afar astern the dark outline of Dauphin Island the mainland was visible, and between them glimmered the lights on the brig and schooner, which had not come out of the pass and were very busy repairing the damages they had suffered from the broadsides of the brig which had escaped them.

And standing near the taffrail, gazing back at the lights of his foes, Captain Revello was so deeply lost in thought that he started as he felt a touch upon his arm, and heard the words:

"Our boy will live, Rudolph."

CHAPTER XXIV.

HIS PLEDGE.

THE brig went on into the darkness of the night, the waves of the Gulf rising higher and higher as she left the shore far astern.

When Captain Revello was joined by his wife, his thoughts seemed not in the present, but afar in the past, back upon the shores which he had just left, and where he had passed through dangers unscathed himself, though his men had suffered and his vessel also most severely.

"Yes, Lucille, our boy still lives," he said in answer to the remark of his wife, which with her touch had so startled him out of his reverie.

"And, Rudolph, it was I who broke the pledge, not to fire upon an American vessel."

"Yes, Lucille, I would not have fired until I had to defend myself at close quarters."

"Had I done so before, our boy would have escaped unwounded, and a number of our crew would now be alive."

"I can but reproach myself at interfering before, now that it has turned out as it has: but I believed that the speed of the brig would save us."

"Yes, and had any other two vessels been upon our track it would have been an easy matter to drop them astern."

"But had you not said to hit back in revenge in the end, we would not now be safe at sea; but all is well now as it is."

"It was the mother that grew revengeful, Rudolph, when they hurt my child, and I feared they would kill him with another fire."

"Yes, I forgot my love of my country and my flag, when my boy was in danger, and so I said strike back."

"Well, I dealt them a blow which will cause them to remember me," said the chief grimly.

"Yes, your punishment was severe indeed; but Revello?"

"Yes."

"I have something to ask you now?"

"Well?"

"I have only you now, and our boy."

"Very true."

"The thought that my parents were dead never once entered my mind."

"I had hoped for a welcome home, for if their hearts were hardened against me, I believed that little Reginald, their grandchild, would soften them toward me."

"But, my God! I found my mother in her grave, and—and—"

"And your father a madman, who forced me to take his life," was the almost indifferent uttered response of the man.

"Yes, he fell by your hand, Rudolph, and that ended the career of those who were so dear to me."

"But I would ask you now, whither you are going?"

"I am going to the island retreat."

"And then?"

"I shall continue my cruising, as you know that I have certain orders to carry out from my Government."

"Yes, and then?"

"I shall return to the retreat."

"And then?"

"You have some plan in view, Lucille?"

"I have, as you should know."

"I do not know however."

"Your memory plays you false at times then."

"In this case yes, I confess it."

"Do you recall the age of our boy?"

"In his fifth year, is he not?"

"He will be five within a couple of months."

"And then?"

"He is growing in intelligence, and all that occurs now will leave a lasting impression upon him."

"I do not doubt it, Lucille, for he is as bright a little fellow as I ever saw, far in advance of his years."

"Then why leave him to grow up to recall scenes in the lives of his parents, and his own life that will bring a flush of shame to his face."

"Why should it?"

"Will it not when he knows the truth?"

"Why should he know what you are pleased to call the truth?"

"He is no fool, Revello, and he will soon begin to think for himself what it all means."

"There is plenty of time yet."

"No, you pledged your word to me, when he was but a few months old, that when he reached his fifth year you would give up your sea life."

"I have not been as successful as I could have wished in laying by gold, as you are well aware the Government has kept so close an eye upon me I could not do as I hoped I could in many cases."

"The result is that I am not near so rich as I could wish, or had hoped to be, and it will take several years yet to hoard up treasure enough to enable us to live as I would desire."

"Several years more will leave such an indelible stamp upon Reginald's heart and brain the tears of angels from heaven can never wash out the stain," bitterly said the woman.

"What would you have me do?"

"I would have you go to the Retreat, get the balance of treasure there and take it, as you did the other, to the hiding-place near my home."

"Well?"

"It will be a fortune, and a large one, though not perhaps equal to your expectations."

"And then?"

"You can return to your country, resign your commission, and depart secretly, coming to join me and your boy at our new home."

"It is my girlhood home, a dear spot to me, and it is mine by inheritance, for well I know that my parents did not disinherit me, be they ever so bitter against me."

"I can claim it, and we can enlarge and improve the place, making it a delightful home where our son can be reared."

"You can have your yacht there, and live like a gentleman, while Linda alone need know the true story of your past and mine."

"Reginald will then forget the past, his sea life, his island home, and grow up to regard himself the son of loving and honorable parents, and care for us as we grow older and journey toward the grave, for the years are fleeting, Rudolph, and the silver threads are creeping into your dark locks even now."

"Do you like my picture, Rudolph, and will you yield to my wish that it may come true?"

She had placed her tiny hand upon his arm and was looking earnestly up into his face, with a look of entreaty hard to resist.

He seemed moved by her pleading and at last replied in a low, earnest voice:

"Lucille, for your sake, and the sake of our little boy, I will make you a pledge."

"A pledge, Rudolph, and not the one I ask?"

"I will pledge you I will, in two more years when Reginald reaches his seventh year, give up the sea and do as you wish, banishing the past and living for the future, for you and my son."

CHAPTER XXV.

A TOY OF FATE.

THE woman knew Revello too well to urge him further.

He had made a pledge as a compromise to her entreaty, and she must feel content in the belief that he meant to keep it.

She had in her own heart, made a resolve which she had vowed nothing should swerve her from did he not yield to her pleading.

It was a last resort with her before she acted to suit herself.

There stood the man whom she had left her home and all for, and lying in the cabin beneath their feet, wounded and suffering, was their baby boy, for whom she would sacrifice life and all to save.

She struggled for that boy's sake, their son, their idol; and if her husband yielded, then she might forget and forgive much, might bury the past in her heart of hearts.

If he did not yield then he had not the future life of the boy at heart as he professed, and as she had.

The compromise to her was but a postponement of a day that was all in all to her, and she feared would never come for her son.

It seemed to her an act of treachery to delay the day, and she bit her lips to keep back the emotion that welled up from her heart.

"Oh, Rudolph, why add two more such years of the past to your life and to mine?"

"Why overshadow our boy with two more years of a life that we can never blot out?"

"And why?"

"For the love of gold which you may never get, and in striving for may end your life in dishonor."

"You forget that I have a charmed life, Lucille," was the response of the man, and he laughed lightly.

"I admit that you appear to so have a charmed life."

"I admit that you are believed to possess a charmed life by your men."

"Have I ever had a scratch, or a wound, and have I ever met with defeat in battle?"

"I admit that you have not, and I marvel that it is so, with all your recklessness and daring exposure of yourself."

"But the pitcher is taken once too often to the well, and Achilles was vulnerable in his heel, and your weak point will some day be revealed, and defeat, dishonor and death will come together."

"Be warned now, my dear Rudolph, my husband, while yet it is time, ere it is too late, be warned and yield to me, for the gold to be gained within the next two years will not compensate you, I am sure, as your conscience will if you do your duty now to your wife and son."

"No, no, Rudolph, do not wait longer, do not put off the fateful day, but move your treasure now, seek your new home, your new life, where no one will know you, know us, and all will be well."

He seemed impressed by her pleading and was silent.

Seeing this, she continued, in the same urgent strain:

"I had not intended to urge you more, when I heard your words just now; I had determined to abide the time and wait; but ah, Rudolph! shadows come before me that will not away, and they all point to the grave, so I implore you he warned while yet it is not too late."

The man lit his pipe, and his eyes flashed.

He had made up his mind and no pleading, no warning or threats could unnerve him.

Ere he spoke his wife knew what he would say and she sighed bitterly.

"Lucille, I have not enough treasure to bring me the fortune I desire."

"In two years more I will have what I need and then I will do what you ask."

"It will be too late then."

"You fear evil?"

"Alas! yes."

"Your fears are groundless."

"I know that they are not."

"You put no faith in the fact that I bear a charmed life."

"I have faith in what my heart tells me will be the end of it all."

"Well, you will find you are mistaken, for the day that Reginald is seven years old I will give up the sea, will put the past behind me and settle down to a life of luxury, happy in your love and the love of our boy."

"Ah, Rudolph, happiness can never come to you now any more than it can to me."

"And why not?"

"Do you ask this?"

"Yes, and expect an answer."

"Can you be happy after the past life you have led?"

"Why not?"

"Why not?"

"So I asked."

"Do you ask this, Rudolph Revello, when a backward glance should bring from their graves on land, from out of the depths of the sea, phantom forms to wreck you, to haunt you, to curse you and to laugh at your every effort to forget and be happy?"

"I do not allow phantoms to arise against me."

"The dead are buried, on sea and land, and their ghosts haunt not me, drive not sleep from my eyes, or cause me one atom of regret or sorrow."

"My God! you say this, Rudolph Revello, and yet my father fell by your hand?" came in almost a groan from the lips of Lucille.

"He rushed upon his death, for he sought my life."

"I was but the instrument in the hands of Fate, to end his career."

"Why should I bemoan and regret the inevitable, Lucille?"

"Heaven have mercy upon you for the utterance of those words, Revello, for God knows I can never forgive them."

"Bah! you will regard it all as I do one of these days, when time has soothed your present sorrow."

"Now I never allow myself to bewail what has been, for it was ordained that it should be."

"That is my creed, Lucille, as I supposed you knew, and it has guided me through life, and I am content."

"Were it not so, then would my life be a curse to me, a hell, for my conscience would drive me to madness."

"As it is, I am what I am, Rudolph Revello, the toy of Fate, a blind follower of Destiny."

"Now go to the cabin and get rest, for you need it, and when eight bells strikes I too shall retire, for now there is no longer any danger from our American foes, and others I do not fear."

She turned in silence away and descended to the cabin, while the man stood where she had left him unmindful of the flight of time, for his thoughts seemed very busy.

"Yes, in two years, for then I shall be ready; but not before."

"My God! if Lucille but knew, if she could but read my future," and the clang of the ship's bell striking "eight bells," midnight, broke in sharply upon his musings.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE RETREAT.

THE brig had gone out into the Gulf without showing a single light.

All was darkness on board, and like a large black phantom she went plunging along through the rough waters.

She was running splendidly and steadily, considering the fact that she carried so much sail.

And her captain drove along until the bell striking the hour of midnight told him that his watch was over, for Senor Antoine Estal came to relieve him of duty.

The young lieutenant saluted his chief politely, as he joined him, glanced aloft and aloft, took a view of the sea and said:

"You are still pushing her, senor, though I see no pursuing lights astern."

"There are none; but I have wished to drop everything out of sight when dawn comes."

"And you wish her still driven, senor?"

"No, for we are well enough ahead now."

"Shorten sail on the brig when you wish."

"And her course, sir?"

"To the island."

The lieutenant saluted and the chief walked away.

He took a few turns up and down the deck and then descended to the cabin.

All was quiet there, but he saw in the dim light the form of his wounded boy, and lying by his side was his wife.

Both were fast asleep and the commander walked noiselessly to his state-room and retired.

The morning dawned brightly, with the wind blowing light, and the brig was making the most of it on her course south by east.

The negro steward had prepared breakfast at the usual hour, and the surgeon had gone into the cabin to see the wounded boy.

Mrs. Revello had retired to her state-room at dawn, leaving the negress Linda to watch by the side of Reginald, and thus the surgeon found them.

Linda was asleep and nodding, and little Reginald was awake and laughing to himself at the funny manner in which the negress would nearly tumble over at times in her sleep, yet dexterously catch herself each time.

"Well, my little man, how are you this morning?" asked Surgeon Sandez, as he entered.

Linda started up and said quickly:

"I was just goin' ter tell yer, sah, he were awake."

Reginald laughed and replied:

"Oh! I am all right, Surgeon Sandez; but my mamma must be awful tired, for when the pain would wake me up I always saw her by me through the night."

"Well, we'll dress your wounds, and they'll feel better then, I know."

He went to work, and when he had finished Linda entered.

She looked haggard, yet very beautiful, in her morning-gown, and said pleasantly:

"Good-morning, Senor Sandez."

"How do you find my brave boy this morning?"

"As bright as a dolphin, senora, and he will soon be on deck again, to help command the brig," was the reply.

The chief now came out of his state-room, and after greeting his boy in a hearty way, asked the surgeon to breakfast with them.

But Surgeon Sandez regretted to say that he had already breakfasted, some time before, as he had not disturbed them in the cabin until it was getting on to four bells, and he was a little anxious about Reginald.

The day passed and there was not a sail sighted to break the horizon of blue water.

Then night fell, and thus the brig held on her way toward the island where Captain Revello made his rendezvous.

The run was a good one, for the breeze held strong and fair, and the brig made the most of it, as she was kept well covered with canvas.

After a week's sail she sighted, one afternoon, an island of the Bahama chain, larger than the others about it.

It also had higher shores, which were bold and precipitous, presenting the appearance of a wall of rock which had no break in it.

A few trees were visible toward the center, giving indication that the island was not wholly barren, and though no channelway was visible, the brig held steadily on toward it.

At the helm was Antoine Estal, who had gone there when the island was a league away, relieving the two men who had been ordered forward.

Placed upon the binnacle was a chart, by which Estal was steering, and beneath it were a number of written directions.

The cry of "land ho," had not brought Captain Revello upon deck, but when the words were heard:

"Retreat ho! stand by to run the channel," he came out of the cabin.

Estal had then gone to the wheel, and soon after Lucille and Reginald had come on deck.

The woman looked haggard and white as though she too had been a sufferer, while little Reginald was cheery and clapped his hands in

joy at coming in sight of the island which he knew as his only home besides the brig.

His head was bound up, and his left arm was worn in a sling; but the boy did not seem to care for this, in truth had become very proud of the fact that he had been wounded twice in action.

The first time he had appeared upon deck the crew had wildly cheered him, an honor which Reginald had responded to by raising his cap, and saying with dignity:

"I thank you, lads."

This had but made the crew cheer the louder and Reginald had to go forward among them and tell them all about his wound.

"The wind is hardly fair for us to run in, Senor Estal," said Captain Revello, as he came on deck, glanced at the island, then the sails and the position of his vessel.

"The tide is running in, sir, so if we round the Whale's Back, we will have no trouble," was the answer.

"But can we round it?"

"Yes, sir, I think so," and the lieutenant kept his eyes upon the chart before him.

The brig held on and did round the sunken rock known as the Whale's Back, and then a glance down into the waters showed that the channel was one of great danger, for reefs were upon all sides, though hidden by the waters.

Sail was shortened gradually upon the brig, which seemed fairly to stagger through the channel, so winding was it, until at last she glided into an open space running obliquely through the rocky wall, and now, with boats out ahead, and stripped of all canvas, was towed into a small but safe basin, a harborage in the island which was indeed a safe retreat.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A MYSTERIOUS SETTLEMENT.

THE entrance to the island basin was not three times the width of the brig, and the harborage was hardly over a couple of acres in size.

A sandy, shelving beach was around the basin, stretching inland to high lands that were fertile and well watered with springs, which flowed into the harbor.

There were trees in abundance, but some of them very high, and the soil was rich and cultivated, for there were vegetables, corn and fruit trees, all seeming well-cared for.

Across the basin were stretched heavy cables, made fast upon the shore, and to these the brig was moored, for in a storm the waters were very rough even in that well-sheltered retreat.

When she had glided in to the cables the brig was made fast to them and the anchor let fall.

Then the topmasts were housed, and in their stead were made fast freshly-cut tree-tops, which could be seen above the rocky summit of the island; in fact, the tops of the lower masts arose to a level with the rocks.

When thus hidden, none upon the deck of a vessel sailing by would ever suspect the presence of a craft anchored in the island basin, nor even that there was a harbor there, such as it was.

The surroundings of the island, too, were such that a vessel could not come nearer than a league, without her crew knowing the waters well, and only Captain Revello, Antoine Estal and two or three others knew the channel in and out of the island basin.

In a storm, the channel could not be run, nor could it in calm weather, even, if the wind was ahead, unless the boats were gotten out ahead to tow in the vessel.

When the brig became stationary, a boat was lowered, and into it got Lucille, Reginald and Linda to go ashore, Captain Revello saying that he would remain aboard to begin repairs at once upon his vessel.

The boat ran to a small wharf, and the mother and her son sprung out.

They were met there by a motley group of men, women and children.

That they were of Spanish origin their dark faces and piercing eyes revealed.

There were a hundred men, women and children perhaps, and they were dressed in the picturesque costume of Mexico.

Some were aged, for their hair was whitened, and their faces seamed with furrows which time alone could make.

Others were younger, and more were youths and maidens, the latter very handsome and with a dashing air that was very attractive.

Upon the shore, excepting a few small fishing-boats nothing was visible to show that these people held intercourse with the outer world.

The brig was the only vessel there, and to leave the island appeared to be impossible.

The crowd gave a warm greeting to both Lucille and Reginald, and their dark faces grew anxious as they saw that the boy was wounded.

Speaking perfect Spanish Lucille answered their inquiries by saying that the brig had been in action and that her little son had been wounded, though not seriously.

Reginald was taken up in the arms of one of the young sailors whose head was still scarred from a cutlass gash in some late action, and

Lucille was thus escorted up the slope to her island quarters.

They were a couple of pleasant cabins that commanded a view of the basin and shores surrounding, and a broad roofed piazza connected them along the front.

Scattered about the island were the homes, a score or more, of the people, and they separated in groups to talk over the return of the brig, when they had escorted Lucille and Reginald to their home.

Linda went to work at once, to prepare supper, and her mistress and Reginald proceeded to make themselves thoroughly at home.

Lucille soon seated herself upon the piazza of her living cabin, where she could watch the movements on the brig, while Reginald went off for a round of the settlement to give to the other children there his story of the battle in which his father's vessel had been engaged.

Lucille watched the housing of the topmasts, the placing of the tree-tops in their stead and the arrangements on board the brig for a considerable stay in the retreat.

Just as darkness fell a boat put off from the brig's side for the shore, and in it was the commanding form of the chief, accompanied by his negro steward and servant.

Other boats soon followed with the crew, the wounded being taken ashore to their respective homes, and soon the brig was deserted by all excepting a guard, commanded by Officer Estal, who always lived aboard ship even when in port.

As if by magic, and seeming like a welcome to Captain Revello, suddenly there flared up as darkness fell, two scores of fires.

But it was the building of fires to cook the evening meal and food for the following day, as there was a law upon the island that no smoke should arise in the daytime for fear of being seen by a passing vessel.

This would indicate that the settlement was a secret one, wishing to remain unknown to the outer world.

The evening meal therefore was always a jollification with all, for breakfast and the mid-day lunch were eaten cold.

Linda had all ready for supper, so that when Tobin, the steward, arrived, he found the fire burning briskly, and had only to broil the fish and cook the vegetables.

Captain Revello threw himself into an easy-chair as he reached his home, and Reginald crept to his place upon his knee, while Lucille sat near.

All were silent and appeared to watch Tobin and Linda with interest as they went about the fire.

At last supper was served, and it was a very tempting repast, consisting of a dinner and evening meal combined.

Revello lighted a cigar after supper, Reginald coiled himself up in a hammock near by, and Lucille sat not far away strangely silent.

Then from the different homes arose voices in song, in laughter, or the sound of dancing feet, as the younger people danced to the sound of the guitar, castanets and tambourine.

And what was this mysterious settlement, who were these strange people among whom, in this far-away southern island, Lucille had found a home?

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IVAN, THE WAIF.

THERE was every convenience in the island retreat for repairing the brig, for a number of spars were stored in a large cabin ashore, and ropes, cables and canvas were there in plenty.

In fact a fleet could almost be fitted out from what was upon the island, excepting in the way of boats, and it seemed a law of the retreat not to have these, excepting the few fishing *puntas* that could not stand rough weather outside.

Among the people ashore were a number of seamen who had been wounded or ill, and so were left behind when the brig last sailed on her cruise.

These had now orders to prepare for the next sailing of the vessel, which would be several weeks after her arrival in the basin.

One afternoon as Lucille was walking with Reginald about the island, gathering wild flowers in the vales inland, they came upon a youth who tendered to her a large bouquet he had gathered.

The youth had often attracted the attention of Lucille before, though he had been kept in the background by his mother, who did not care to have him go to sea.

The father of the lad had been killed some time before, and the boy was all that his mother had to love or care for.

He was a handsome young fellow of sixteen, with large, lustrous dark eyes, waving black hair and a slender, graceful form.

Captain Revello had several times said to his wife that the boy was as handsome as a girl and bore a striking resemblance to her, and this fact others had noticed also.

"Well, Ivan, it is kind of you to give me these flowers, for I believe you gathered them for your mother," said Lucille.

"No, lady, I gathered a bunch this morning for mother, and these are for you."

"And I thank you for them, but must ask you to carry them home for me."

"Yes, lady; but is the chief there?"

"I think he is aboard ship; but why do you always seem to fear the chief as you do, for I have noticed before that you seldom come where he is?"

"I do not fear him, lady, for he has ever been kind to me; but I feared he would wish to take me to sea, away from my mother, and she asked me to stay with her as long as I could."

"And you have been a dutiful son, Ivan, to your good mother; but I heard she was ill, so tell me how she is?"

The boy had seemed strangely nervous, and now his eyes filled with tears, while he said:

"Lady, my mother is dead."

"Dead?" cried Lucille in amazement.

"Yes, lady, my mother died this morning, and I gathered the flowers to lay upon her breast."

"These I got to ask you to place them also upon my mother's form, for she would feel happier if she knew it, I am sure."

"My poor boy! but why was not I told of your mother's illness and death?"

"She has suffered with her heart much of late, lady, but would not let me tell."

"This morning she died suddenly, as though going to sleep, while several of the women were with her."

"Then I came to gather these flowers for you, and to ask you if you would tell the chief to take me with him on board the brig, for I have no reason to stay here ashore now, as my mother is dead."

The woman was silent a moment, and her thoughts were busy, for her expression revealed that she was torn by conflicting emotions.

At last she said:

"Ivan, I will go with you at once to your home and place these flowers upon the form of your dead mother."

"Oh thank you, lady."

"Then, Ivan, I will return home and see that your mother is buried decently, for so it must be."

"And I can go with the chief, lady?"

"Yes, you can go as the chief's especial cabin-boy, so as not to have to mingle with the rough sailors, for you are not of their kind Ivan."

"Oh thank you, lady, thank you ever so much, for it is just what I wished only I dared not ask so much of him, or of you."

"But, Ivan, you must make me a promise."

"I will, lady."

"You must promise to say nothing about going on the brig, for I will arrange it all with the chief, and you shall go aboard just before the vessel sails."

"Yes, lady."

"When your mother is buried, you come to my house, for there you shall remain until the brig sails."

"You are so good to me, lady," and the voice of the youth quivered with emotion.

Then Lucille and Reginald went on with him to the little lone cabin, for it stood far apart, where had dwelt his parents.

Little over a year before, the three, father, mother and son, had been found upon a wreck sighted by the brig, and taken off.

They had said little of themselves, more than that they were from New Orleans, and bound to Havana, when their vessel had been caught in a storm, began to leak, and the crew had deserted her and them in the night.

Taken to the island retreat of Revello, De Sol had become a sailor on board the brig, and was soon made a junior officer, but was killed in battle, and the mother and son left alone among the strangers, to them, who were dwellers in the rendezvous.

Now the mother had gone, and Ivan was left alone.

The cabin was scrupulously neat, and within upon a cot lay the dead form of Mrs. De Sol.

Her face showed traces of great beauty in her younger days, and there was about her always an air of refinement that showed that her life had been far different in the past.

Two women sat by the door talking in a low tone, but rose as Lucille approached.

Entering the cabin Lucille placed the flowers gently upon the heart of the dead woman, and her lips moved as though she was murmuring a prayer.

Ivan said he would remain by his mother until all was over, and then Lucille and Reginald returned to their home.

Several hours after, just at sunset, the body of the poor woman was laid to rest in the grave, in the little island cemetery, and over her Lucille recited in her full, rich voice the service for the dead, the islanders, men, women and children standing about with uncovered heads the while.

As the twilight deepened, all turned away, leaving Ivan sobbing bitterly upon the grave of his mother.

No, one remained, and that one was Lucille, who led the orphan boy away to her own home, while she said in a low voice:

"I will be a mother to you now, Ivan."

CHAPTER XXIX.

UNDER SUSPICION.

THERE appeared to be a strange sympathy felt for Ivan De Sol, the young waif of the sea, by Lucille, the wife of the island chief.

She kept him constantly with her, and also appeared to keep him out of sight of Captain Revello.

One day she said to her husband:

"Rudolph, when do you sail?"

He lay in his hammock smoking, and it was after the noonday lunch.

Ivan was away in the island with Reginald, who had become devotedly attached to the youth, and who returned his affection fully.

Linda was asleep in the shadow of a tree nearby.

Lucille had come out of the cabin for the express purpose of having a talk with her husband.

"I sail within two weeks," he answered.

"Of course you wish us to go with you?"

"No, Lucille, not upon this cruise, for I have to go to Vera Cruz and report, and of course there will be the same old charges to refute and much worry."

"Will you be gone long?"

"Perhaps six months, though of course I cannot tell, as the Government may have orders for me to detain me."

"You anticipate no trouble?"

"Not particularly; but then I have many foes and of course there is always the dread that some one of the crew may turn traitor and—"

"Hardly, bound as all are by the vow of our league."

"Still, one man might be tempted, you know, and of course I would have to prove him a falsifier."

"As your word and the testimony of your officers and men would do."

"Yes, doubtless; but then there is the dread all the while, you know."

"Well, Rudolph, Reginald and I will of course remain here if you wish; but I have a special favor to ask of you."

"Granted of course, Lucille, before it is known."

"You are very kind, though it is not much after all."

"Name it, Lucille."

"You know the boy, Ivan?"

"Yes, though it is seldom I get a glimpse of him."

"Well, he is faithful, willing and intelligent, and now that his mother is dead, he wishes to go to sea."

"All right."

"But he is well-born, I feel sure, modest and retiring, and if you would, instead of sending him to the forecastle, let him go as your cabin-boy, I would be so glad."

"I hardly need him in the cabin, having Tobin."

"Well, you would find him invaluable, I am sure; and let him sleep in the cabin, and not forward, so that he will not have to come in contact with the rough men, for I feel the deepest sympathy for the boy."

"Well, I will do as you wish, so send him aboard."

"No, he is devoted to Ivan, as our boy is to him, and so I will keep him here until the last moment before you sail."

"As you please."

"Tobin likes the boy, too, and will have an eye upon him, and I will feel that you will be more comfortable with Ivan to look to your interests."

"All right, Lucille, and I will be kind to him for your sake, if only because he is the living image of you."

"You have said so before, Rudolph."

"Why, he is your very counterpart, in hair, eyes, and sunburned face, while his form is as graceful as a girl's."

"Once or twice I have thought that Ivan was a girl."

"Nonsense! his parents had no reason for deceiving you about him, and he was in male attire when we took them from the wreck."

"Yes, I guess he's a boy."

"I know that you are wrong, Rudolph; but I thank you for taking him with you, and he shall have a neat uniform made and be all ready before you sail."

The chief now sunk into a deep sleep, for he was wont to take his daily *siesta* in his hammock, and Lucille arose and went over to where Linda was.

"Linda."

"Yes, missus."

"I wish you to tell Tobin when he again comes ashore that I wish to see him particularly."

"Yes'm."

"But I do not wish any one to know that he comes to see me."

"I understand's, missus."

Then Lucille walked away in the rear of the cabin, taking a path that led into the interior of the island.

She had not gone very far before she heard laughter, and soon came upon Reginald and Ivan sailing a miniature craft in a stream.

The boat had been skillfully made by Ivan for the little fellow, and rigged also, and Ivan was delighted with it.

"Well, Ivan, leave Reginald to play with his boat while you come here, for I wish to talk with you," said Lucille.

Ivan obeyed and sat down upon a mossy bank near where Lucille had seated herself.

He wore white duck pants, a sailor blouse and tarpaulin, and certainly there was a striking resemblance between the two, in face, form and voice.

"Ivan, the chief has said that you can go with him on his next cruise."

"Oh, lady, I am so glad, and you it is that have done this for me."

"I asked him, yes; but you are to go as his cabin-boy, sleeping and eating in the cabin, so will have nothing to do with the men."

"I am glad of this, lady, for I am not rough by nature and the men often shock me."

"Tobin will be good to you I know, for I shall have a talk with him, and you will be contented I think."

"Yes, lady, perfectly contented, I am sure."

"But, Ivan?"

"Yes, lady."

"I have a special favor to ask of you."

"Certainly, lady, you have but to command me."

"I will explain my wishes at the last minute, for I cannot do it now, Ivan, and I feel that you will trust in me."

"Fully, good lady," was the answer, and Lucille sent Ivan back to play with Reginald, while she remained where she was and watched them.

But her eyes were upon the youth, neither son, and she seemed to watch his every expression of face and action.

At last she murmured to himself:

"Yes, I can and will do it, for I know that Revello intends to play me false."

"But it will be a game that two can play, and I will win, for there is too much at stake for me to lose."

CHAPTER XXX.

TOPAZ.

CAPTAIN REVELLO had determined to place his vessel in perfect trim before sailing.

He had decided to go into port, and he would carry the brig in trim and in perfect shipshape condition.

So she was overhauled from keel to truck, scars were patched up, new sails bent on, paint freely used and the uniforms of the crew brushed up for the cruise.

All this took time and over a month went by before the brig was ready to sail.

In leaving the island Captain Revello never allowed his day of sailing to be known to any one, other than his first officer, his wife and Tobin.

The negro was given the information so as to prepare against it in the way of providing the fresh vegetables and provisions from the island.

Tobin was as faithful as a hound, for he knew nothing outside of the orders of his chief and Lucille.

He had swum out to the brig one night, when she was at anchor in port, and coming over the bows, was attacked by the crew and would have been cut to pieces had not Lucille rushed to his aid and saved him.

He was a perfect deformity, his shoulders being flat and broad, his back humped, his arms extremely long and his legs short.

His head was of enormous size, his features huge, and his eyes deep-sunken yet full of expression, at times almost tender and pathetic, at others fierce as a wild beast's.

He dressed in red always, sailor pants and blouse, wore a white skull-cap, with gold tassel and yellow sash, while his feet were always bare.

About his neck he wore necklaces of coins, one of gold, the other of silver and containing a coin of every nationality from the highest to the lowest denomination.

The silver necklace alone was worth hundreds of dollars, and the gold amounted to far more.

Upon his huge fingers he wore gold rings, some with precious stones, and in his large ears were rings also set with a large pearl each.

Long-bodied, short-legged, yet six feet in height, and dressed as he was, it was no wonder that when the negro appeared over the bows of the brig, at night, dripping wet out of the sea, that the crew attacked him, in their superstition believing him to be some marine monster.

He had hurled them from him as though they were children, for he was a giant in strength; but with boarding-pikes and cutlasses renewing the attack, he would have been killed but for Lucille.

She had led him to the cabin and questioned him.

He said he had been deserted in port by a Spanish vessel, and wished to again go to sea as the captain's servant.

"I like your looks and I'll give you a trial," said Captain Revello, and he did so.

Nor had he ever had cause to regret it, for Tobin was a fine cook, as gentle as a woman in

spite of his strength and appearance, and though he never spoke to one of the crew he was not apparently unfriendly to them.

Lucille and Reginald he seemed to adore, while he was also devoted to the chief and followed him about like a shadow.

He had said his name was Topaz, but little Reginald in his boyish lisp had called him Tobin, and the name clung to him rather than the one he had given.

The crew eyed him askance, yet never interfered with him again, though some shook their heads dubiously when talking of him and asserted that they had Satan as a shipmate, and the captain was welcome to keep him in the cabin, as his presence was not welcome in the forecastle.

Topaz spoke English fluently, and without the negro dialect, but he also spoke Spanish and French equally as well, and seemed an adept at learning languages.

His duties were to cook for the captain and care for the cabin alone.

He slept on a mat at the gangway, leading from the chief's cabin to the officers' quarters, and no one could have entered at night without arousing him, for he was always on the alert.

If he ever carried a weapon no one had discovered it, for he kept it hidden securely somewhere in the folds of his costume.

Such was the negro who reported to Lucille, when next he came ashore, having been told by Linda that her mistress wished to see him.

Linda greatly admired Topaz, though she stood in awe of him without doubt, and he always treated her with friendly consideration.

When Topaz sought Lucilla he found her seated in the shade of some trees not far from the cabin.

The chief was on board the brig and the negro approached Lucille in his deferential way, doffing his skull-cap and waiting for her to speak.

"Ah, Topaz, I am glad you have come."

"Linda said that Our Lady of the Island wished to speak with me."

"I am here, lady," was the courteously uttered response.

"Yes, Topaz, I wish to have a talk with you."

"I am the slave of Our Lady of the Island."

"My husband sails soon?"

"Our Lady knows."

"Has he told you just when?"

The negro was silent and Lucille said again:

"Will you tell me just when?"

"Our Lady does not know then?"

"No, for I have not asked the chief."

"Topaz is the slave of Our Lady."

"Then he will tell me?"

"The third night after this one coming."

"The hour?"

"Midnight, when the tide turns to run out, Our Lady."

"Thank you."

"Our Lady is welcome."

"Now, Topaz, I am not going on this cruise, but I send with the chief the boy, Ivan, who goes as cabin-boy; and I wish to intrust him to your especial charge."

"I hear, Our Lady."

"Watch over him and I will never forget you."

"See that he comes to no harm."

"When the brig is ready to sail he will go on board with you at the last moment, and you are to let him sleep in my state-room, for he is not to go forward among the men."

"I understand, Our Lady."

"And, Topaz, you are not to say to the chief that I spoke to you of this, of the boy, Ivan."

"I will obey Our Lady's command," was the answer of the negro, and after a few words more he took his departure, while Lucille mused aloud:

"Now I am ready to play my game."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE BRIG TO SET SAIL.

CAPTAIN REVELLO had been, even more than usual, secretive about his time of sailing.

Repairs were still going on, and yet they were of such slight use that the brig could readily sail without awaiting their completion.

The chief was wont to spend much of his time ashore.

He would stroll about the island gun in hand, shooting sea birds, and he practiced as much with his pistols as with his rifle.

The crew were disciplined each day, drilled at the guns, and kept up to the mark as though the vessel was at sea.

The tree-tops, when withered, had been replaced by fresh ones, so that no vessel passing near could discover the cheat.

The captain always slept on board ship, no matter how long he remained in port, though his wife and son preferred the cabin ashore.

One afternoon just at twilight, Captain Revello came ashore to have some dinner with his wife and boy.

Linda had prepared a tempting meal, and when it was over Lucille asked:

"When do you think you will sail, Rudolph?"

The answer came very quietly:

"To-night."

The woman started slightly, but said calmly:

"You have said nothing of this to me."

"There was no need, as you were not going with me, so did not have to prepare."

"Well, I thought, as you were going away for a long cruise, you would perhaps let Reginald and myself know about the time you would leave."

"There are reasons why I have kept it particularly quiet."

"Reasons for not allowing me to know?" quickly asked Lucille.

"On no; but there are several in the island who I preferred should not know."

"You suspect them?"

"Well, you know my law never to allow any one to leave the island, and some may be tired of remaining here, and in league with a man aboard ship could be stowed away until we reach port, where they could make their escape."

"For these reasons I prefer not to allow any one to know when the vessel would sail."

"And you go to-night?"

"At midnight."

"I would have prepared for your going had I known it."

"Topaz has done all that is necessary, thank you."

"And you will take Ivan?"

"Oh, yes."

"Will Topaz come on shore again before sailing?"

"Yes, I will send him ashore at the last moment."

"Then I will have him take Ivan back with him."

"Very well; but now let me ask you about that box of jewels you have in keeping."

"I have them hidden away."

"Well, send them to me by the boy."

"Will you take them with you?"

"Yes."

"And other treasure?"

"Yes."

"Then you anticipate going into Mobile Bay?"

"I thought of it."

"To bury more treasure with the other?"

"Yes, I thought we might as well get all hidden away there that we could, and as I will come that way I will take the treasure with me and leave it."

"Will not the crew suspect?"

"I will take only the small treasure, which I can easily handle, or which Topaz can carry ashore."

"I will give him the box to bring off, then, when he comes ashore."

"Do so, and when we accumulate more, we can save to bury at another time."

"You mean within the next two years, Rudolph?"

"Yes, until the time when our boy is seven years of age."

"Suppose your Government should arrest you, when you enter port?"

"What for?"

"It may be forced to do so from rumors that have been in the air."

"Nonsense!"

"Do not be too sure."

"I am not at all fearful of there being any trouble."

"But should there be?"

"The Junta will not dare harm me, for I could tell too many ugly things for them to do so."

"I trust all will be well."

"All will," was the decided answer, and a few moments after the chief arose and said:

"Has Reginald retired for the night?"

"No, he is with Ivan somewhere."

"I will call him."

"Do so, for I wish to bid him good-night, though it will be good-by, as I sail without seeing him again."

Lucille called the boy, and he came bounding into the cabin.

"Are you going away, father?" he asked.

"I am going aboard ship, as usual, my boy—good-night."

There was a tremor in the man's voice, and his kiss was more in earnest than was the accustomed good-night one, and then Reginald bounded away to play with Ivan once more.

"Now, Lucille, it is good-by to you."

"Say *au revoir*, rather, Rudolph, for good-by is a word that seems to me like a last farewell."

and in a short while he was fast asleep, while his mother paced to and fro as though in painful meditation.

Then she went to one corner of the cabin and where there appeared to be a window.

It was, however, but a mock one, for the shutter opened revealing a narrow closet in the wall, and from this Lucille took a small iron-bound box and some leather bags which were heavy, as though they contained gold.

These she placed upon a table, and then, stepping to the door, called to Ivan.

The youth quickly appeared, and Lucille said: "Now go and get ready, for the time has come to act, as the vessel sails at midnight."

"I obey, Our Lady," was the answer.

Then Linda was called into the cabin, and Lucille said:

"Now, Linda, I am ready, for the brig sails within two hours."

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE SECRET DEPARTURE.

It was just half an hour before midnight when a tap came at the door of Lucille's cabin, and in answer to the question as to who was there the deep voice of the deformed negro responded:

"It is Topaz, Our Lady's slave."

Within the cabin were three persons.

It was the sitting-room they were in, and an open door led into the adjoining room where Reginald was serenely sleeping.

The three in the room were Lucille, Ivan and Linda.

The youth was dressed in his new uniform, of blue cloth pants, blouse woolen shirt, silk sash and tarpaulin, and he looked very handsome in his sailor attire.

When told to enter the door opened and in stepped Topaz.

He was bare-footed, as usual, wore his scarlet costume and skull-cap, and bent low before Lucille.

"You are going to sail to-night, Topaz?" said Lucille, somewhat sternly.

"I only knew that we sailed to-night, Our Lady, but an hour ago."

"I believe you, Topaz; but you are here to obey me, I suppose!"

"I am Our Lady's slave, to die if so she commands it."

"The chief has sent you here?"

"For a box of value, Our Lady."

"It is here, and these bags go with it, for they are too large to get into the box."

"Yes, Our Lady."

"And you are to take with you Ivan?"

"I am, Our Lady."

"You are to remember all my instructions."

"Topaz will not forget, Our Lady."

"And your oath?"

"Topaz never breaks his word, Our Lady, and hence, his oath is as sacred as his honor."

The words were delivered with dignity and impressiveness, and it seemed strange to hear this huge, deformed negro speak thus of his honor.

But he spoke the truth, for he was above a mean action, or at least had so proven himself since his coming on board the brig.

"Then, Ivan, it is time to say farewell," said Lucille.

Thus far the youth had uttered no word.

But now he arose and silently glided into the next room where little Reginald slept.

The sound of weeping was heard there, and not until Lucille called to him did he return to the room where she was.

Then he grasped the hand of Linda with the one word: "Farewell." The negress burst into tears and moaned as though parting with one dearly loved.

But Ivan had turned quickly to Lucille who drew him toward her in an affectionate embrace.

"Remember—" Ivan began, but could say no more, and quickly turning away left the room, while Topaz took the box of treasure and the leather bags and followed.

Lucille stepped to the door and looked after them, Linda standing by her side and still weeping.

They saw the tall form of Topaz, and the slender form of the youth going down the slope to the shore, Ivan now carrying the two leather bags of gold.

They saw them in the starlight reach the beach, heard the sound of oars in rowlocks, and beheld the brig lying off in the basin.

Then all was silent for awhile.

"Come, Linda, I will get Reginald and we will go to the Lookout Rock to see the brig sail," said Lucille.

Reginald was awakened and told that his father was going.

The boy was wide awake in an instant, threw on his pea-jacket and tarpaulin and went with his mother and Linda up the path leading to the summit of the island.

Here were a number of rocks, over which the masts of the brig would have been seen out at sea, had they not been hidden by the tree-tops cut to hide them.

The three saw the tree-tops lowered from the masts, then the boats go out ahead with oars muffled, as though not wishing a sound to awaken the sleeping islanders.

The boats moved slowly ahead, the brig left her moorings and slowly glided toward the rocky pass which formed an entrance to the basin.

Standing on the rocks, Lucille, clasping the hand of little Reginald, watched the brig move slowly out of the basin, while Linda, who seemed still to bitterly mourn the departure of Ivan, rocked to and fro in deep grief as she knelt by their side.

The boats headed out through the rocky gateway, the tide in their favor, and as they got the brig clear of the island the rigging swarmed with men and the topmasts went up and were soon in position.

Out through the circuitous channel moved the brig, some one at the helm who knew well how to steer and understood the dangers to all which a fatal move would bring upon them.

Further and further went the brig from the island, until at last she was seen to remain stationary.

Then the dark objects ahead moved back toward the vessel, showing that the boats were being called in.

Soon after in the bright starlight was visible the glimmering of snowy canvas, and the brig felt the breeze that was blowing and moved swiftly away in the darkness over the rippling waters.

Until she grew dim in the distance, looking like a shadow, the three on the rocks watched her going.

At last Reginald cried out:

"She is gone!"

"Yes, your father has gone," was the low response of Lucille.

At this a moan came from the lips of Linda, and she said with great earnestness:

"Lord hab marcy on that vessel, and don't let her come to no harm, for dere is precious lives she carries."

"Amen!" came in a fervent voice from Lucille who then said:

"Come, Reginald, we must return home now."

The little boy kissed his hand gallantly in the direction in which he had last seen the vessel disappearing, and then the three retraced their way to the cabin and retired to rest for the remaining hours of the night.

When the day dawned there was surprise in the island settlement, for the people had not suspected the going of the brig so soon, and her secret departure had been known to but the three who had stood on the rocks watching her going out to sea in the darkness.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE DENIAL.

CAPTAIN REVELLO did not give the order to arouse the crew to get under way, until Topaz returned on board the brig, accompanied by Ivan.

The men had been sleeping on board the past two weeks, so all were ready to sail at the will of their chief.

Topaz entered the cabin accompanied by Ivan, the latter seeming to hang back in a retiring manner as though abashed.

"Well, Topaz, you are back again," said the chief.

"Yes, Senor Master," answered the slave.

"And the box?"

"It is here, master," and he drew from beneath a serape he carried the treasure-box.

"And the key?"

"The key was given to the Senor Ivan, by Our Lady, master."

"Ahi you have it then, my lad?"

"Yes, chief," was the low response of the youth, and then in a louder tone he added:

"And I have two leather bags of gold, chief, which were given me by Our Lady, for they were too large to get into the box."

"Ah yes, the gold, and I had forgotten it," eagerly said the chief.

"Here are the bags, Senor Chief, an i here the key of the box," and there was a tremor in the hand that was extended toward Revello.

But the latter did not note the confusion of the youth and said pleasantly:

"Well, lad, I am glad you are to serve me, and I know I will find you most valuable."

"Do you read?"

"Yes, chief."

"And can you figure?"

"I can, chief."

"Well, you shall be a kind of clerk to me as well as servant."

"Topaz will show you where you are to sleep, and if you are tired you can go and turn in."

"No, chief, with your kind permission I would like to watch the brig go out to sea."

"All right, go on deck, and send Lieutenant Estal to me."

Ivan left the cabin with considerable haste, found Officer Estal and delivered his message.

He saw the officer enter the cabin, while he took a stand in a secluded spot near, where he would escape notice.

Soon after Lieutenant Estal came out of the cabin and went forward.

Almost instantly the brig began to awake from its long sleep, for the men appeared, boats went off ahead, and soon the vessel moved.

Captain Revello came on deck, but did not notice the shrinking form of the lad, or if so, said nothing.

He watched the movements upon his vessel in silence, saw Officer Estal take the wheel, the chart being placed over the binnacle light, where it was distinctly revealed, and thus stood until the brig was clear of all danger.

Then came the stern voice of the chief ringing through the ship:

"All hands ahoy to make sail!"

Ivan watched the men with the deepest of interest, and not until the brig was bounding merrily along, leaving the island far astern, did he turn to go.

"Come, lad, you must turn in, or you will be of no use to-morrow," said Captain Revello, though not unkindly.

Ivan started, for his gaze was upon the far-off island, disappearing in the distance, and he had not believed that the chief even saw him.

So he saluted quickly and went below.

Topaz was in the gangway coiled up upon his rug, but arose instantly and showed the youth to the state-room which Lucille had said he was to occupy.

Then came a low-uttered expression of thanks to the negro, and all dressed as he was Ivan threw himself upon the berth to almost instantly sink asleep.

He did not hear Captain Revello, Officer Estal and Surgeon Sandez enter the cabin to have a bottle of wine together to drink success to the cruise, and only awoke the next morning when aroused by Topaz.

In an instant he was upon his feet, and soon had the breakfast table ready for the chief, whom he called at seven bells.

The chief gave him only a glance, and soon after sat down to his breakfast alone, for he had the cabin all to himself when his wife and boy were not at sea with him.

"You will be very useful to me I think, lad," said the chief after breakfast, as he went on deck to take his watch beginning at eight bells, and to relieve Estal.

"I will try to be, senor," was the low response of Ivan, and he sat down to eat his own breakfast as Topaz bade him do, for so Lucille had requested that it should be.

When he went on deck, after the things were cleaned away, Ivan saw no land in sight.

The brig was sailing merrily along at a six-knot pace, and looking very saucy and dangerous, as though her rest had done her good.

Thus passed several days, and Ivan had begun to feel at home in his new berth.

Though still retiring he was not quite so easily embarrassed, and did not start when addressed by the chief.

Captain Revello had had him count over the gold in the bags and put down the amount.

Then he had opened the box and emptied its contents upon the cabin table.

They were a strange lot, for there was jewelry of various kinds, necklaces, bracelets, rings, eardrops and gems of rare value.

They were all put down by the youth in a book, and their approximated value written opposite in a somewhat cramped yet legible handwriting.

Then the chief had taken from a secret drawer in the cabin another lot of treasure he had stowed away there, and this too, with its value, was marked down in the book by Ivan.

"No bad showing, eh, lad," said the chief.

"No, chief, it seems like a large fortune."

"To you, yes; but to me it is not a fourth of what I will have some day, so you will do well to serve me faithfully."

"I will, chief, though not for gold, for you saved my life and the lives of my parents."

"I am glad I have that hold upon you, and that you appreciate it; but now, lad, answer me a question?"

"Yes, chief?"

"Did not my wife send you aboard here to play the spy upon me?"

"Oh, chief!" and the youth seemed deeply moved at the charge against him.

"Tell me the truth, and you shall never regret it."

"No, no, Senor Chief, the Lady Lucille would never be so base as to send me as a spy upon her husband," was the almost indignant response of the youth.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

PUT TO THE TEST.

THE brig swept on her way, no one but her commander knowing her destination.

After his talk with Ivan De Sol in the cabin, when he had charged him with being a spy set upon his actions by his wife, the chief had said nothing more upon the subject for some days.

The denial of the youth had seemed to impress him, and he had kept his own counsel.

That Ivan was not over popular with the officers and crew was a fact.

The former regarded him with disfavor, ex-

cepting Estal and Surgeon Sandez, the former treating him with kindness, the latter seeming to be unconscious of his very existence on board.

The other officers, however, regarded the youth as a pet of the chief, sharing the honor of the cabin, the table and all, where they could not.

The crew did not like him from pretty much the same reason, for men seldom esteem a commander's favorite.

One afternoon Captain Revello called Ivan into the cabin.

It was just a week after leaving the Island Retreat.

"You wish me to serve you, chief?" said Ivan, in his polite way.

"I wish to have a talk with you, Ivan."

"Yes, chief."

"Sit there."

Ivan modestly obeyed.

"I wish you to tell me something about yourself."

"Myself, chief?"

"So I said."

"There is little to tell, Senor Chief."

"Tell that little."

"What would you know, chief?"

"Where were you born?"

"In New Orleans, senor."

"My wife was born there also."

"Indeed, chief?" and the youth looked pleased.

"Yes, and your parents were Spanish?"

"My father, senor, was Spanish."

"Yes, De Sol was his name?"

"It was, chief."

"And your mother?"

"Was French, senor, and of American birth."

"What was your mother?"

"The daughter of a sugar-planter, senor, on the Mississippi River."

"And your father?"

"Was a sea-captain, senor."

"A man of wealth!"

"He was poor, senor, but my mother loved him and became his wife."

"She was disowned by her rich and aristocratic parents, but lived happily with my father, who became a merchant."

"He received word of some property left him in Havana, and we were on our way there when our vessel was caught in a storm, sprung a leak and was deserted at night by the crew while we slept."

"You found us the next day, senor, for the vessel did not sink, and so it was we owed you our lives and you have ever been good to us, Senor Chief, and a lifetime of devotion can no more than repay you."

The lad spoke earnestly, and the chief said, after a few minutes of thought:

"Now, Ivan, I have another question to ask you."

"Yes, senor."

"Do you recall your earliest childhood?"

"As far back as five years, senor, I recall."

"There was no doubt as to those whom I found you with being your parents?"

"Oh, no, indeed, senor."

"You never heard anything to the contrary?"

"Not a word, senor."

"Nor heard aught to arouse a suspicion that you were not their child?"

"I never did, senor."

"Now about this fortune you say your father inherited?"

"Yes, senor."

"It was from some one in Havana, you said?"

"Yes, chief, an uncle who died there."

"A Spaniard?"

"Yes, senor."

"What was your father's uncle?"

"A planter, senor, it was said."

"And a rich man?"

"So it was reported, senor."

"Married?"

"No, chief."

"And your father was his heir?"

"He was, senor."

"What was his name?"

"Ivan De Sol, senor, the same name as my father's and mine."

"Your father was doubtless named after him?"

"Yes, senor, as I was."

"My uncle was a Spanish noble."

"Well, Ivan, I will see if I can not get for you this fortune, for you should have it."

"I fear it will not be for me, senor."

"You have proofs of your identity?"

"Yes, senor."

"What proofs have you?"

"Papers and jewelry belonging to my parents, senor."

"Well, I shall put into Havana some time and get this fortune for you, see if I don't."

"Ah, Senor Chief, you are so good to me."

"Well, I only ask that you be faithful to me in return."

"I will, chief."

"I did suspect that you had been sent aboard here as a spy, by my wife."

"Why should Our Lady wish to set a spy upon you, senor, whom she so devotedly loves?"

"Oh, pure jealousy, for women are terribly jealous, you know."

"But all say that you have been so true, so loyal to Our Lady, senor, and she feels also that you have."

"It is true, and I have been," and there was a strange emphasis on the word "have," as the chief uttered it.

"Then you were such a friend to my wife, who seemed so wrapped up in you, I grew suspicious."

"Senor, Our Lady went to my home when my poor mother died, and she placed flowers upon her stilled heart, and read the Services for the Dead over her."

"This I can never forget, while she was sympathetic and kind to me, and treated me with much goodness."

"Then I loved little Reginald, Senor Chief, and you, too."

"Well, Ivan, I believe now that I have misunderstood you, and now I wish to have you understand me."

"Yes, chief."

"I wish you to help me, to serve me well, and I will enrich you."

"You are a member of the League of Red Rapier Rovers, because your parents were, because they preferred to join us than be set adrift upon the sea to trust to fate."

"You will now have to take our oath of allegiance, and then I will place full confidence in you, and when you have served me as I wish, I will secure your fortune for you, left by your uncle in Havana, and allow you to go your way a free man."

"But this must be a secret between us, for it is against our laws to allow one of our League to go free, excepting that death frees him."

"Now answer me if you are prepared to take the oath of allegiance to the Red Rapier Rovers?"

"I am, senor," was the firm response.

"Then you shall do so," was the low, stern response of Revello.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE OATH.

IT was a strange ceremony, and a weird, terrible one that was to be enacted upon the brig, when one of the crew was to take the oath that would unite him to the Sea League known as the Red Rapier Rovers.

Every man was compelled to take that oath, and the women too.

Children were exempt if their parents belonged to the League, until they were fifteen years of age, when they were old enough to understand the nature of the vow they were to register.

Ivan De Sol had not taken this oath, though his parents had done so when they first became members of the band.

"So you will take the oath, Ivan, and become one of the League by so doing, as you have been one through the acts of your parents for you?" said Captain Revello in his talk in the cabin with the youth, a week after the brig left the Island Retreat.

"Yes, Senor Chief, I am ready to take the oath at your command."

"It is a horrible ordeal for one of your years to go through with, lad."

"My mother did not shrink from it, Senor Chief, and I shall not."

"You are a brave lad, and I will order the crew to assemble at midnight for the ceremony."

"I will be ready, Senor Chief," was the quiet rejoinder of the youth.

"When you are one of us, by virtue of your oath, then I will not hesitate to trust you as I wish, for you can be of great service to me when we reach port, if you are not—"

"Not what, Senor Chief, may I ask?"

"Secretly the friend of my wife rather than myself."

"I see that you doubt me still, senor."

"A certain something I cannot explain, urges me to do so."

"I am sorry, Senor Chief, for though I am indeed the friend of your wife, Our Lady, and of your son, I yet owe all to you, and the strongest of ties bind me to you, my chief."

"Well said, and I will no longer doubt you, once you have passed through the ordeal before you."

"I am ready for the test, senor, at your command."

Captain Revello said no more then, but orders were issued for the crew to assemble at midnight, to witness the test oath administered.

All wondered at this, for Ivan was not thought of as the one to swear allegiance, and no stranger was known to be on board the brig.

Just fifteen minutes before twelve o'clock the brig was put under shortened sail.

Then the flag, hauled down at sunset, was run up at half-mast.

It was the black flag, with the Red Rapier in the center.

The men assembled, all robed in black, and the officers came in solemn silence, and formed a line across the stern of the brig, their backs to the taffrail.

Then four seamen, robed in long black gowns, came from the hold, bearing with them a red

coffin, across which was strewn the Red Rapier flag.

The coffin was placed upon the deck, resting upon four grinning skulls, and the lid was removed.

Then the chief came on deck, the brig's bell tolling dimly the while.

Taking his stand Captain Revello called out in his deep voice:

"Bring forth the candidate!"

Out of the cabin came the negro, Topaz, and he was leading by a halter about the neck, Ivan De Sol.

A low murmur ran through the brig as the crew saw who the candidate was.

The negro placed him at the foot of the coffin, and then proceeded to iron him.

Manacles were placed upon the lad's wrists and ankles, but he did not flinch, even though the ship's bell kept up its solemn tolling.

"The candidate is ready, Senor Chief, to take the oath," came in the deep tones of the negro.

"It is well, for he must now learn the nature of his oath," said the chief.

Then Surgeon Sandez stepped forward with an open book in his hand, though he could not see to read by starlight, and said, in his sepulchral tones:

"Candidate, I ask your name?"

"Ivan De Sol," was the low, but distinct reply of the youth.

"You are registered on the brig's books?"

"I am."

"Your age?"

"I am in my seventeenth year."

"You desire to attach yourself to the Sea League of the Red Rapier Rovers?"

"It is my desire."

"You are willing to conform to the laws?"

"In every particular!"

"To obey the chief in all things, and, above all, Our Lady of Luck, when she makes the demand upon you?"

"I am."

"To defend the League above everything, and to have its laws held above all others of Heaven and earth?"

"Yes."

"You are willing to take the oath of allegiance?"

"I am."

"You are to take this oath lying in your coffin here, in iron, with your hands clasped over your heart, and you are to repeat after Topaz, the ship's slave, the words of the vow which you register, when you are to be placed to sleep by a drug which you are to take, while you utter the prayer that if you take this oath unwillingly you are never to awaken from your deep sleep, but to be buried alive in the sea, when your coffin-lid has been closed above you."

"If you are willing to take this oath, to risk this ordeal, answer yes or no."

"I am ready," came in the clear voice of the youth and now he was the coolest one on the brig's deck.

"It is well," said Surgeon Sandez, and turning to Captain Revello he continued:

"I accept the candidate, Senor Chief, in behalf of the Sea League."

"Then do your duty, Topaz," came the order from Captain Revello, and in the deep tones of the slave were heard the order:

"Candidate, take your place in your coffin."

The youth obeyed, seating himself in the coffin.

"Here is the draught which you are to drink."

"It will not affect you for some minutes; but when you have drank it, lie down in your coffin."

Ivan bowed slightly, took the goblet in his manacled hand and without the tremor of

Then came the dread test, and the life of each candidate lay within the hand of Topaz, the slave.

It was for him to open the coffin, gaze down into the upturned face, by the aid of a lantern, and say whether the lips had sworn falsely or not.

How could he tell?

No one knew, and men of sense were certain that he could not, though the superstitious believed that he possessed the power and Revello encouraged this belief.

The bell still tolled, the flag still remained at half-mast, while the brig glided along at a funeral pace over the dark waters, not a word breaking the deathlike silence.

The chief held his watch by the binnacle light, and told off the moments, until at last his voice broke the stillness with:

"Now the test of truth or treachery!"

Topaz then raised a dark-lantern from the deck, unfastened the coffin-lid and flashed the light into the face of the youth.

He looked strangely like death.

Not a word was said, all waiting breathlessly while the negro made his search in that upturned face for truth or treachery.

At last his deep voice was heard, and a sigh of relief came through many lips:

"True as steel!"

"Release him!" came the quick command of the chief, and the negro placed beneath the nostrils a small bottle.

The effect was soon evident, for Ivan breathed heavily, then moved and arose from the coffin.

The first to grasp his hand was Chief Revello, and then as he stood there, half-dazed, wondering, awed, officers and men passed by and gave his hand a grip in silence.

He had faced the ordeal, taken the oath and was a member of the Red Rapier Rovers' League of the Sea.

Silently did Topaz lead him back to the cabin, remove his manacles and bid him retire.

How long he slept he did not know; but he was awakened by the loud cry on deck of:

"Sail ho!"

The day was just on the eve of dawn, and the cry awakened Captain Revello, whom Ivan heard spring from his berth, while Topaz also arose quickly.

Then Ivan, too, arose, drew on his heavy pea-jacket and went on deck.

The wind was blowing fresh, the sea was running high, and the day was just dawning.

Antoine Estal was in charge of the deck, and Ivan heard him say to the chief:

"A vessel off our port bow, sir, and close on, for it was too dark for us to see her before!"

The chief at once turned his glass upon the stranger with the remark:

"I do not believe he has seen us yet; but the wind has blown up hard since midnight, has it not?"

"It has been blowing stiff, sir, for three hours; but what do you make of the stranger, senor?"

"A large schooner and armed."

"An American, I am sure, as well as I can make it out, and if I do not make a very wide mistake, she is none other than the schooner that gave us the hot chase out of Mobile Bay," and the chief held his glass to his eye while he spoke.

Instantly Antoine Estal took a closer view of the stranger, in the now brightening dawn.

He watched for full a minute and then said:

"You are right, Captain Revello, it is our old enemy, the American schooner that chased us with the brig out of Mobile Bay two months ago."

"And now they see us; but hold on as you are, Estal," cried Revello, as the schooner's sudden maneuvers showed that the brig had just been sighted from her decks.

The dawn now revealed the schooner distinctly, and quickly came the sound of the drum on board beating to quarters.

The schooner was coming down with the wind over her starboard quarter, while the brig had it upon her port beam, and both vessels were traveling very fast, being now half a league apart.

The crew of the brig went quickly to quarters without orders, and the flag was run up on board and saluted with a gun.

It was the Mexican flag, and instantly to the peak of the schooner went up the Stars and Stripes.

There was no doubt now about the schooner, for it was the Spiteful, the same craft that had chased the brig out of Mobile Bay.

Without her consort the Battle Bird, the commander of the schooner yet made a bold stand.

Would he at once open fire upon the brig, as an old enemy of the Spiteful, or would he acknowledge a right for her to show the Eagle and Serpent flag and amicably meet her commander until enmity was proven, or lawlessness?

Captain Revello eyed the schooner closely, took in her tonnage, battery, crew and sailing qualities, and said in his quiet way:

"She had best be careful, Estal, for we can thrash her."

"Without a doubt, sir; but there is nothing to gain in a combat with her but hard knocks, and it would be well, if you will pardon me, senor, to claim your rights as a cruiser."

"Oh yes, if he will believe me; but if not he must fight."

"Of course, senor; but see, he is going to fire a shot over us."

A puff of smoke came from the bows of the schooner just then and a shot flew in front of the brig as a hint for her to come to.

Captain Revello's face flushed with anger, but Estal quickly said:

"Remember, Senor Chief, he regards you not as a cruiser, but a rover, and therefore has the right to make the demand he does."

"Very well, bring the brig to and let him send a boat aboard of us," said Captain Revello, and it was evident that his haughty nature rebelled at obeying the demand of an American cruiser for him to come to upon the high seas.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE SCHOONER AND THE BRIG.

WHEN Lieutenant Archer Dean, of the American schooner-of-war Spiteful, received the broadside of the mysterious brig, which he was chasing in company with the Battle Bird brig-of-war, he was a very much surprised man.

He had not expected a blow in return, any more than had Captain Louis Dudley, after the long silence and suffering of the chase without hitting back.

The damage on board the schooner too was considerable, as Lieutenant Dean saw at a glance.

His vessel had been brought to a sudden standstill by the sudden dropping of her anchor, and she had worn around broadside to the sea.

One of her guns had been dismounted, the fore and mainsail halyards had been cut by shot, and some half-dozen men killed and wounded.

It was a very severe blow, and one that showed the chase could defend herself when the time came for doing so in the mind of her commander.

Captain Dudley was also amazed and saw the bowsprit of his brig shot away, with at her damage done that threw her out of the chase at once.

Of course, had the brig put about and borne down to give battle, both the cruisers could have made a good fight of it; but where it was to chase a nimble-heeled craft like the fugitive, that was out of the question.

It was with little disappointment that the two commanders and their crews saw the brig sail away in the twilight and feel that she had escaped them.

She had also not fired under any of the flags of nations she had shown, but under one with a black field and red rapier in the center showing her lawless character beyond all doubt.

In the crippled condition of his vessel Captain Dudley at once hailed to have a boat sent to the Spiteful for him, and the two crafts got in under the shelter of the land to anchor for the night and repair damages.

An examination of the injuries received by the brig convinced Captain Dudley that he would have to return to Mobile for repairs, and so he sent a part of his crew on board the schooner to hasten on with her work, so she could put to sea in the hope of overtaking the brig.

The next day the Spiteful got up sail and stood out into the Gulf in search of her foe, while the Battle Bird made her way back to the port of Mobile to repair damages, and meanwhile send a boat over toward the vicinity of Spanish Fort to see what the strange craft had been doing there.

Lieutenant Dean had begun a systematic search for the stranger, running into Pensacola, Tampa and Key West, and hugging the coast close to see if he could learn aught of his enemy from vessels he came up with.

Thus the time passed, until the young officer decided to go to the southward, touching at Galveston and other points, for certainly some craft must have come up with the fugitive brig.

But every vessel he spoke gave the same answer, that no craft answering the description of the one he sought had been seen by them.

"I wonder if she was so badly crippled by our fire as to go down that night, for the Gulf was very rough, you remember, Leslie?" said Archer Dean.

"It was a very hard dying blow she gave us, lieutenant, if she did go down; but my idea is that she may have been crippled enough to seek a hiding-place for repairs."

"Yet we have heard nothing of her."

"True, sir."

"And she is in none of the retreats known to us."

"Yes, but she may have a dozen hiding-places that we know nothing of, sir."

"That is so. But you are convinced that she is the Ocean Rapier?"

"Did not her firing under the flag with a black field and a red rapier in the center show it, sir?"

"Yes, I must admit that; but the woman and child on board?"

"We can only solve that mystery, sir, when we capture her."

"You have seen this commander of a Mexican brig, who you say is often charged with lawless acts?"

"Yes, sir, I have met him."

"And would know him if you saw him again?"

"Yes, as well as I would his vessel."

"Well, I only hope we can come up with this lawless brig, somewhere, for it would be honor enough to capture her."

"Indeed it would, Lieutenant Dean," assured Lawton Leslie, with enthusiasm.

So the Spiteful continued her cruise until one morning, just at dawn, the man aloft startled all with the loud cry:

"Sail ho!"

It was the brig, and the schooner had already been sighted from her decks, as has been seen.

Archer Dean was soon on deck, when Lieutenant Leslie was officer of the watch.

"Well, Leslie, that looks like an old enemy," he said as he turned his glass upon the brig.

"It is, sir."

"She is not changing her course either, if she sees us."

"No, sir, and she sees us, for she sighted us before we did her."

"Then she means fight?"

"It is hard to tell, sir; but as we know well how hard she hits, we had better be prepared for her."

"Yes, order the drum to beat to quarters."

The order was obeyed, and in a quarter of an hour after the crew of the schooner were at their guns and the craft was all ready for action.

The brig had held steadily on, but her men were seen to be at quarters and a fight was certain all felt if the stranger proved to be the Ocean Rapier, which no one on the Spiteful held the slightest doubt of.

When the brig fired a gun and ran up the Mexican flag, the Spiteful set her colors.

"She begins as before, Leslie, with the Eagle and the Serpent flag?"

"Yes, Lieutenant Dean; but shall we send a shot across her bows as a hint for her to come to and that we intend to stand no nonsense?"

"Yes, Leslie, do so, and we will make her show what she is, or fight, for if she is the Ocean Rapier then she must be our prize, if she is an honest Mexican cruiser, she must prove it," and Lieutenant Dean was in deadly earnest now, and so the gun was fired across the bows of the brig.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE MEETING.

THE quick response of the brig, to the demand of the schooner to heave to, was not expected upon the Spiteful.

Both Lieutenant Dean and Lawton Leslie were surprised.

The latter at once set it down to a trick of some kind to gain an advantage, and said:

"Be careful, Lieutenant Dean, for those Mexicans are as slippery as pirates, if it is the craft I believe, and I would wager a year's pay that I am not wrong."

"I will send a boat aboard of her, Leslie."

"Shall I go, sir?"

"I did intend to go myself."

"But you are commander, sir, and I know the captain, if it is the Mexican cruiser."

"True, so you can go."

"Order a boat lowered as soon as we lay to."

The schooner was now within hailing distance of the brig.

The latter was quietly lying to, her men at quarters, and all serene on board.

The schooner's crew were also at their guns, and she was bearing down in fighting trim.

Suddenly through his trumpet Archer Dean hailed:

"Ojo la Brigatina!"

Back came the answer, in the clear voice of Revello, and without the aid of a trumpet, and in perfect English:

"Ahoy the schooner-of-war!"

"What brig is that?" asked Dean, now discarding his trumpet.

"The Mexican brig-of-war Sea Spur."

"What schooner is that?" was the response.

"It is, as I said, the Mexican brig, or the outlaw pretending to be," muttered Lawton Leslie.

"The American schooner-of-war Spiteful," answered Archer Dean to the question asked.

And then he added:

"I will send a boat aboard of you."

"Ay, ay, sir, you will be welcomed," was the reply.

"Leslie, I will go myself, for I have a curiosity to solve this mystery, if mystery it is, and I shall have the captain to breakfast with me, so you can meet him."

And Archer Dean ordered the schooner brought to, which was at once done.

"If there is any trickery I will hail you, so at once open fire and carry him by boarding, for do not mind me and my boat's crew."

"Ay, ay, sir," was the response, and the boat pushed off from the schooner's side.

The sea was rough and it danced about considerably; but the four oarsmen rowed well, and the coxswain steered perfectly.

As the boat ran under the lee of the brig, Captain Revello himself stepped to the gangway,

and received his visitor in a most courteous manner.

"I am Rudolph Revello, senor, captain of the Mexican brig-of-war Sea Spur."

"Permit me to welcome you on board," he said, extending his hand, and speaking in perfect English.

"And I am Archer Dean, senor, lieutenant and commander of the American brig-of-war Spiteful, for as there was doubt about your vessel, I came myself to see that there was no mistake."

Instantly, as they walked toward the cabin, the Mexican flag was dipped three times, and the American colors were run up to the fore; while the Mexican marines presented arms, a salute and honor which Archer Dean promptly acknowledged.

"I must ask your pardon, Senor Captain," he said, "for my doubt of you; but your craft is the very counterpart of a brig we chased out of Mobile Bay some two months ago, and which one of my officers averred was the pirate craft known as the Ocean Rapier; in fact, it was reported to me secretly that the buccaneer was hiding in the bay, and with an American brig-of-war I gave chase."

"Yet failed to capture her, senor?"

"Yes, I regret to say, for she was too fleet for us, fast as were our vessels, and a dangerous foe as well."

"I am sorry, Senor Captain, that you failed to capture that vessel, for I have suffered untold annoyance and trouble on her account."

"Your vessel is her counterpart, I assure you."

"I know that but too well, senor, for her lawless acts have been placed to my credit, and I have had to explain and explain to my Government that I had not turned pirate, for charge after charge was made that the Sea Spur was buccaneering in the garb of a Mexican cruiser."

"I confess that I have heard as much, and I hope, if I do not capture your vessel's double, you may do so, and thus vanquish your unkind accusers; but Captain Revello, I told my officers that I would bring you back with me to breakfast with us, and any of your officers whom you may care to ask to accompany you."

"You are most kind, senor: but—" and he paused for nearly half a minute, and then said:

"I will accept with pleasure, senor, and my surgeon will accompany me."

A short while after, the boat was upon its return to the schooner, and as his guests Archer Dean had with him Captain Revello and Surgeon Sandez.

"It's the Mexican captain," muttered Lawton Leslie, as he descried the strangers in the boat, and then he added:

"Now is that man falsely accused or not?"

"Is that the brig we chased out of Mobile Bay, or is it the counterpart of a pirate craft?"

"Such things have been, and the Mexican captain may be a wronged man after all."

"I wonder if he will remember me?"

With this Lieutenant Leslie called the men to welcome the guests, the marines stood at a "present," and the Mexican flag was run up to the fore, while the American colors were dipped in honor of the brig's captain.

"My senior lieutenant, Mr. Lawton Leslie, Captain Revello," said Archer Dean as he led his guests aft, and he looked fixedly at his officer to note the effect of the meeting.

As Leslie stepped forward Captain Revello's face brightened and he said quickly:

"Ah, my dear Senor Leslie, whom I have had the honor of meeting before, and in my own country."

"I am proud of the honor again, senor."

"As I am in meeting you once more, Captain Revello," answered Lawton Leslie, who was now convinced that the handsome Mexican was a wronged man.

Then the four, the two commanders, with Leslie and Surgeon Sandez, sat down together to breakfast, and as both the Mexicans spoke English fluently there was no lack of conversation and Captain Revello charmed his host completely, for the chief of the Sea Spur was a very fascinating man when he so desired to be.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

IN CLOSE QUARTERS.

THE breakfast in the cabin of the schooner was an enjoyable one, and cigars following afterward on deck, it was several hours before Captain Revello said that he must return to his vessel.

His charming manners, wit and praise of Americans had quite won over his hosts, while Surgeon Sandez also was voted a delightful companion.

In returning to the brig Lieutenant Archer Dean himself escorted his guests back again, and, urged to come on board and at least accept the hospitality of a glass of wine, he did so.

He was shown over the brig and was loud in his praise of the beautiful vessel, her well disciplined and fine looking crew.

"But who is that young lad, Captain Revello?" he asked, referring to Ivan De Sol.

"He is my cabin-boy, senor, and so very

intelligent and useful that I make a kind of clerk of him as well."

"I have seen him somewhere before."

"You cannot recall where?"

"No, it is impossible for me to do so."

"If you wish I will call him and the lad may remember."

Ivan was called and saluted as he approached.

"Ivan, the Senor Captain thinks he has met you before somewhere, but he fails to recall the time and place."

"The captain's face is familiar to me also, senor; it seems hardly possible that we have met," responded Ivan.

"I feel that we have, yet fail to remember when and where, my lad."

"You are not a Mexican?"

"Gh yes, senor."

"Yet you speak English perfectly."

"My mother was an American, Senor Captain Dean."

"Ab! you know my name, it seems."

"The Senor Captain but now spoke of you, senor, as Captain Dean," was the prompt reply, though Archer Dean did not recall the circumstance.

It was Ivan who gave them the wine, and when soon after Archer Dean left the brig he said to himself:

"That boy's face haunts me."

"I wonder if a face so beautiful, as it really is, can be a boy's?"

"It may be a woman after all, for these handsome Mexicans are sly dogs, it is said, when lady loves are concerned."

Returning to the schooner Archer Dean saluted the brig and the two vessels parted company, each holding on their respective ways when they had met.

"Well, Leslie, what do you think of your friend Revello now?"

"That he has been maligned, sir."

"Then you do not believe that he is the pirate it is rumored he sometimes becomes under the guise of a cruiser?"

"I do not, sir, and the resemblance to his vessel which the Buccaneer Ocean Rapier possesses, enables the outlaw to play the bold game he does and for which Revello suffers."

"He is a charming man, indeed."

"He certainly is, Lieutenant Dean; but what did you think of his vessel?"

"She is a beauty, and everything is shipshape on board, the crew under perfect discipline and in fact she is a splendid cruiser and an honor to the Mexican Navy, or any navy in truth."

"So she struck me, sir."

"But there is a lad on the craft whose face fairly haunts me."

"A boy?"

"Well, yes, he is so called; but I cannot believe it, for he possesses a beautiful face and a slender, graceful form a woman would envy."

"An officer, sir?"

"No, a cabin-boy, and clerk for Revello."

"It may be a girl, sir, in disguise."

"That is what struck me, and if so Revello must know it."

"I should judge so, sir, for he is a dangerous man among the fair sex, and has had any number of amours in Mexico, with half a dozen duels, several of them fatal, I heard."

"He is a dangerous man among men then also, I should judge; but I wish I could solve the mystery about that boy, for his face comes before me like a dream."

"It is a face to see and never forget, a face to love were it a woman's," and Archer Dean seemed really impressed by his meeting with Ivan De Sol.

The day passed, and another followed, without a sail being seen.

But upon the morning of the third, just before the break of day, the officer of the deck was startled by seeing a bright red flash in the distance, and it was followed by the roar of a heavy gun.

Instantly all were aroused upon the schooner and the men were called to quarters.

Only a light breeze was blowing, and it was threatening to die out and becalm the schooner; but she still held enough of it to move down in the direction the flash had been seen.

Lieutenant Dean had come on deck, and was sweeping the sea with his glass, when another red flash was seen, and the roar of another gun was heard.

"It is not in the same place as the other flash, sir, for it came from over a league away," said the officer of the watch.

Then came another flash, and another, and it was seen that the shots came from two different vessels.

Soon after a distant blaze lighted up the sea afar off, and it was seen to be a blue light burning on board a sloop-of-war.

Then followed another blue light, from away down to leeward and Archer Dean called out:

"That is the brig-of-war Battle Bird!"

All who had seen the last vessel said the same, and then came the query:

"What does it mean?"

The schooner was still moving on with a light breeze, and after awhile they beheld directly ahead two quick flashes, and Archer Dean said:

"Those guns were fired from a third vessel, Leslie."

"Yes, sir, and she lies between the other two."

"Without doubt, and all three are becalmed."

"Yes, sir, and the two who burned blue lights are Americans."

"Yes, and they have caught a foe between them, but have no wind to bear down upon her, or she to escape."

"That is about the solution of it, lieutenant."

Soon after Archer Dean said:

"Here comes the dawn, and then we will see what it all means."

"Yes, sir, for we still hold a breeze, light as it is."

A few minutes more and the dawn came, and with it shots from the vessel between the other two, and which the light revealed was being borne down upon by boats from the sloop-of-war and the brig.

Whatever the unknown craft was she was in very close quarters.

CHAPTER XL.

ACCUSED.

THE scene of the three vessels was a surprise to those on the schooner, for two of them were at once recognized.

These were the brig-of-war Battle Bird, and the Mexican cruiser Sea Spur.

The third craft, a sloop-of-war, was not known to the crew of the Spiteful, but her colors hanging limp at the peak were seen to be the Stars and Stripes.

The situation, too, of the trio of vessels was a strange one.

The Sea Spur lay between the two cruisers, and about the same distance from each, a little over a league.

She seemed to have glided in between the two Americans at night, and then become becalmed.

The sails of all three vessels hung limp and useless, flapping lazily with the roll of the vessel.

From the Battle Bird and the sloop were boats filled with men, and pulling toward the Sea Spur.

There were four boats from the brig-of-war and five from the sloop, and all were crowded with men armed to the teeth, a force to carry by boarding double the number that were there to defend their vessel.

At these boats, or over them, the two shots had been fired from the Sea Spur, to warn them off.

When the schooner suddenly came in sight with the dawn of day, those on the three vessels and in the boats discovered her.

Coming in a bank of mist, and borne by a light breeze, she had gotten within half-a-league of the Sea Spur before she was discovered by any of the three vessels.

The wind she brought was very light, just enough to give her steerage-way, but she was moving, while the others were becalmed.

The fire from the Sea Spur had not checked the advance of the boats to the attack, but, seeing the situation, Lieutenant Dean said:

"There, Leslie, you see that Captain Dudley and the commander of the sloop are after that Mexican, believing it to be an outlaw's craft, as we did.

"I must stop this."

"Unless it is the Ocean Rapier, sir, and not the Mexican cruiser," said Lawton Leslie.

"Very true; but I say it is the Mexican beyond all doubt."

"As I do, sir; but so many have been mistaken in the two vessels, the Sea Spur and her Double, that I hardly know what to say."

"Yes, but the three cruisers have the brig hemmed in beyond all escape, that is certain, so I will prevent any attack until we know which the craft is."

With this the young lieutenant ordered the long-boat lowered, with the crack oarsmen of the crew to man the oars, and springing into the stern-sheets told the lads to pull with a will.

The long-boat had a shorter distance to pull than had the attacking boats, and more, she was not loaded down with fighting men, having only a coxswain and middy, besides the lieutenant and his crew.

At the bows a white flag fluttered, and the boat fairly leaped through the waters toward the brig.

It could be seen that the brig was ready for action.

Her men were at the guns, her marines ready to fire, and boarders prepared to repel boarders, while her sails were set to catch the slightest breath of air that might aid her to run away from her foes.

The light breeze which had wafted the schooner to the scene had now died out, and she too was becalmed.

The crew of the brig at bay watched the coming of the long-boat with deepest interest, for they beheld the flag of truce in her bows.

They watched also the coming of the other boats to the attack, and stood ready to open fire when their captain should so command.

The crews of the boats rushing to the attack

did not seem to exactly understand the long-boat's appearance upon the scene, though they saw that she came from an American cruiser.

Back upon the Battle Bird and sloop-of-war, the officers and men left behind regarded the situation with the deepest interest.

As he saw that the boats still pressed on, and that the brig at bay was about to fire, Archer Dean leveled his glass at the make of the stranger.

"There hangs the Mexican flag."

"It is Captain Revello and I must save him and prevent bloodshed if I can do so," he cried, and rising in the boat he called to the coxswain to hand him the white flag, and he waved it, first toward the boats of the sloop, then toward those of the Battle Bird.

The latter were the first to note his wish, for they were seen to slacken speed, then come to a stand-still, and one shoot out from the rest head toward the long-boat.

"There, Dudley knows that I wish to prevent an attack for some reason, and he yields," said Archer Dean, and he waved now constantly toward the boats of the sloop-of-war.

As he did not flirt the flag again toward the brig's boats, the officer commanding those from the sloop appeared to understand that he was expected to do as Captain Dudley had.

What it meant he could not tell; but the schooner's boat seemed in earnest, and as the brig could not escape, he ordered his crews to cease rowing, while he obliqued in his boat and pulled to head off Archer Dean.

And the halt came just in time, for the matches were lighted to fire the guns on the Mexican brig, and they were trained for deadly work.

As the three boats now neared each other, approaching a given point, the long-boat and those from the sloop and Battle Bird, the men pulled more leisurely.

Approaching within hail Lieutenant Dean called out:

"Ho, Dudley, ahoy!"

"Ahoy, Dean, old fellow, how are you, and have you stopped our attack upon the buccaneer to have a hand in his capture yourself?" came in Louis Dudley's well-known voice.

"No, indeed, Dudley, I have stopped your attack because that is not the craft you seek."

"It is the Ocean Rapier."

"No indeed!"

"Yes, but I know it is the buccaneer."

"Not a bit of it, for I know it is the Mexican cruiser Sea Spur, whose Double is the Ocean Rapier."

The three boats were now close together, and in the commander from the sloop-of-war Archer Dean recognized a brother officer and called out:

"Ho, Moxey, I am glad to see you."

"And I to see you, Dean; but what is the reason you called a halt in an attack upon yonder pirate?"

The three boats were now grouped together, the men resting upon their oars, and Archer Dean said in answer to Lieutenant Hugh Moxey's question:

"I called a halt, because I knew that you, as I did, mistook yonder brig for the buccaneer Ocean Rapier."

"It is the Rapier."

"On the contrary, Moxey, it is the Mexican brig-of-war Sea Spur."

"Why, Dean, is not that the brig we chased out of Mobile Bay over two months ago, and that checked our pursuit by two broadsides?"

"No, Dudley, it is not, though it is her counterpart."

"But only yesterday afternoon that brig boarded and robbed an English barque upon the high seas."

"Impossible, Dudley."

"No, for we were cruising together, the sloop and my brig, and coming in sight of her ran her off, for she was lying alongside of the barque robbing her."

"The captain of the barque we spoke and he said that she brought him to as a Mexican brig-of-war and then proved to be the buccaneer Ocean Rapier, and he took a strong box from his cabin containing twenty thousand in gold."

"If that is the case, Captain Dudley, it must be the buccaneer Ocean Rapier, though I could swear that it was the Mexican cruiser Sea Spur whose captain breakfasted with me three mornings ago."

"You are mistaken, Dean, not we," Moxey said.

"Well, suppose you and Captain Dudley go in my boat with me, under my white flag, and we will see who is right, for if you are, you can readily attack in your boats, and if I am, then we will be saved firing upon a Mexican cruiser."

"I agree to this," said Captain Dudley promptly.

"As I do," was Lieutenant Moxey's response.

"But will he allow us to approach, think you?"

"He will not dare fire upon a white flag, and if it is the Mexican brig, the captain will recognize me," answered Archer Dean.

The boats now hauled alongside and the two officers of the brig and sloop got into the long-

boat with Archer Dean, who at once gave the order to pull, under the white flag, toward the brig at bay.

CHAPTER XLI.

MISTAKEN IDENTITY.

THE boats from the sloop and brig, which their commanders had just gotten out of, remained astern of the long-boat, pulling very slowly.

The other boats, resting upon their oars, remained in position to await a signal from their commanders.

The schooner was now becalmed, and lay about two miles from the brig which was the bone of contention.

The sloop-of-war was nearly a league distant to the eastward, the Battle Bird a like distance to the westward, so that they with the Spiteful formed a triangle, the disputed brig being in the center.

For the brig at bay to escape, even with a stiff breeze, was utterly out of the question.

Yet her crew still stood at their guns, as though determined to fight to the death if attacked.

The long-boat moved swiftly, the three commanders in the stern, where waved the American flag.

In the bow was the flag of truce, and whether it would be acknowledged as such by the commander of the craft at bay would soon be known.

The brig lay with her broadsides to the sloop and Battle Bird, her stern toward the schooner, so that the long-boat was approaching from astern.

Nearer and nearer drew the boat, until at last it became evident that, pirate or not, the flag of truce was to be respected.

"Or perhaps we are to be entrapped," suggested Lieutenant Moxey with a light laugh.

"It may be," Captain Dudley responded, while rising in the boat, which was now within hailing distance, Lieutenant Archer Dean called out:

"Ahoy the Sea Spur, ahoy!"

"You should hail in Spanish, Dean," whispered Moxey.

"If it is my man, English will do," was the answer.

Then came from the brig in the deep voice of an officer standing on the quarter-deck:

"Ahoy the boat! what boat is that and what do you want?"

"Ho, Captain Revello, I know that voice."

"I am Lieutenant Dean of the American Schooner of War Spiteful."

"Ah, senor, glad to meet you again, and so soon."

"Come aboard with your friends, for there has been some mistake."

"What did I tell you?" said Archer Dean, triumphantly.

"There is no mistake, Dean, for that craft is the one that robbed the barque, though her captain now seems to be what you claimed him to be, a Mexican officer," Lieutenant Moxey earnestly replied.

"Well, we shall see; but I want proof before I yield my belief that there is a mistake in the man and his vessel," and raising his voice he called out:

"I thank you, senor, and we will come aboard, for there is a mistake which you can explain away."

"Without doubt, senor," said Revello, and as the boat ran alongside he met the officers at the gangway and they were received with full honors.

Captain Revello warmly extended his hand to Archer Dean, who grasped it with equal warmth and presented his brother officers.

Both bowed a little stiffly, but in his courteous way, Revello said:

"I am glad to meet you, senors, in a friendly way, and welcome you aboard my vessel to drink your very good health, rather than greet you cutlass in hand, as it seemed certain a short while since I would have to do, owing to some mistaken idea you entertained that you had to fire upon a Mexican cruiser."

"But is this a Mexican cruiser?" asked Captain Dudley, somewhat bluntly.

"Under the circumstances, senor, I am unable to comprehend why you ask that question, but come into the cabin, please, and we can arrange the differences that appear to be between us."

The visitors followed in silence, all glancing at the beautiful brig, the men now having aft quarters, and the American flag hanging from the fore, for there was not a breath of air to stir it.

"Ivan, serve breakfast, please," said the Mexican captain, when they had entered the beautiful and sumptuously furnished cabin of the brig.

"But, Senor Captain, we came on an urgent mission, and I beg you not to extend any hospitality," urged Captain Dudley.

"My dear Captain Dudley," was the pleasant and smiling reply:

"One is always in a better humor after eating, and I believe that my friend here, the Captain Dean, will vouch for me that if I am proven

a buccaneer, as you seem to believe, you can bring me to the yard-arm as such, while, if you are wrong in your surmise, you will have done no wrong in accepting my hospitalities."

"Now, senors, of what am I accused?"

"I confess, Captain Revello, to being nonplussed by this reception and the appearance of all about me; but the truth is, we, Captain Dudley and the sloop-of-war of which I am senior lieutenant, saw what we deemed to be this craft robbing an English barque yesterday upon the high seas."

"We ran out of an inlet upon them lying side by side, and the pirate took to flight, but we spoke the barque, which, in trying to escape, had had the foremast shot away."

"And the barque's captain told you he had been boarded by the buccaneer brig Ocean Rapier, I suppose, Senor Lieutenant Moxey?" quietly asked Captain Revello.

"Exactly, and it was this brig."

"My Double again, senors, for it is needless for me to say, or should be so, that this cruiser, a Mexican brig-of-war, is not a pirate."

"But, senor, the vessels are counterparts."

"True, Captain Dudley, thoroughly counterparts."

"And we gave chase to the brig and find you."

"You gave chase to the pirate?"

"We did."

"When was this?"

"Yesterday afternoon."

"How far distant were you from the buccaneer brig, senors?"

"Within a league."

"And you pursued her?"

"Yes, through the night, and, becoming becalmed before dawn, sent our boats to attack."

"One question, senors?"

"Certainly."

"Did you lose sight of the buccaneer during the night?"

"Well, yes, we must confess that we lost her for an hour or more."

"Then, senors, it is a case of mistaken identity, for you found my brig instead of the buccaneer, that is all."

CHAPTER XLII.

AN EXPLANATION.

AT the cool remark of Captain Revello, that it was a case of mistaken identity, that the sloop and brig, in chasing the buccaneer at night, had lost sight of her, and found the Sea Spur soon after, Archer Dean laughingly said:

"I told you so, Dudley; you and Moxey are wrong in this, I assure you."

"I sincerely hope so; but the case was just this:

"We found the barque being robbed by a vessel which took flight when sighting us."

"The pirate was a brig, answering the description in every particular of this vessel."

"We gave chase, and I recognized in the pirate the very craft which you, Dean, and I chased out of Mobile Bay some time ago, and which we knew was the buccaneer Ocean Rapier, for we had proof of it."

"What proof, may I ask, senor, which causes you to deem the buccaneer vessel and mine the same?" quickly asked Captain Revello.

"Well, while we lay off Mobile in the river, Lieutenant Dean's vessel and mine, a youth boarded the Spiteful who reported to us that the buccaneer Ocean Rapier was lying over in an inlet near Spanish Fort, undergoing repairs, and had a boat then in port getting supplies."

"Did this informant give you any proof by which you could recognize the pirate, Senor Captain Dudley?"

"He told us where to find her, and she ran out ahead of us the following morning, and more, though taking our fire in silence until she reached the outer bar, she poured upon us a broadsider which prevented further pursuit, did she not, Dean?"

"Yes, the buccaneer badly worsted us."

"Under what flag was she sailing?" asked Revello, in the same quiet way.

"The Mexican flag first, and then she showed respectively the English, Spanish, French and American flags, until she hoisted her own colors, a black field and red rapier, when she gave us her broadsides."

"I have asked, senors, as I have been the great sufferer from this vessel, for merchant captains have reported to my Government that I was robbing them upon the high seas."

"Now I have never met this Double, this twin brig of my beautiful vessel, and only long to do so."

"By a strange coincidence she is in these very waters, and losing sight of her last night for awhile you sight me instead, pursue and now charge me with being the buccaneer."

"Of course, when I saw that you were in chase of me I ran, and when becalmed and you showed that you intended to attack me, I intended to defend my vessel to the last, though I could not understand your hostility toward me."

"Now I understood you to say you left the barque yesterday afternoon?"

"Yes."

"About what time, may I ask?"

"Before sunset, half an hour."

"She was crippled?"

"Yes, her foremast was shot away."

"Then she could not have possibly repaired damages, with a merchant crew, under some hours?"

"Hardly."

"What was her name?"

"The Spray."

"English you said, señor?"

"Yes."

"Out of what port, and whither bound?"

"From Havana, and bound to Liverpool via New York."

"Well, she must have felt this calm, and crippled as she is, she could hardly be very many leagues away now."

"Your vessels look like fleet sailors, and mine is I know, and when the wind comes we could overtake the barque within a day without doubt."

"Yes, we could do that," said Captain Dudley.

"Well, señors, my proposition to you is to sail in chase of the barque, confront me and my officers and men with the people of the robbed vessel, and if they say that I and my officers are recognized as those who boarded and robbed their craft, then you can hang me to the yard-arm of my own vessel, make my crew prisoners and sell the Sea Spur as a pirate for your own benefit."

"I say this, for the vessel is mine, as I built her for the Government, armed and equipped her."

"Now, señors, what do you say?"

"Shall we give chase to the barque and solve this question?"

The words were frankly uttered, and they had their effect with the hearers.

Archer Dean had not a shadow of suspicion against the commander of the Sea Spur being other than he professed, and Captain Dudley frankly said:

"I confess that I believe I have wronged you, Captain Revello."

"We lost the pirate and found you, and hence the mistake, as your vessels are doubles."

But Lieutenant Moxey looked troubled.

He too was personally won over by the proposition of Revello, but he said:

"Senor, I would gladly do as Captain Dudley has, and confess my error; but I do not command the sloop-of-war Scorpion, and my captain is a martinet, and at times most unreasonable, so I must consult with him, tell him the situation as it appears to me, and what Captain Dudley and Lieutenant Dean decide, and leave the rest to his decision."

"Under the circumstances I must beg to be excused from breakfasting with you, and so will return at once to the sloop-of-war and report."

As there was nothing else to be done, Lieutenant Moxey left the brig, Captain Revello escorting him to his boat, and he pulled rapidly away to the sloop-of-war.

Revello returned to the cabin meanwhile, and entertained his two guests at breakfast, and seemed the while not the least disturbed at the situation he was placed in.

Thus over an hour passed away, and then it was reported that Lieutenant Moxey was returning, and that the sloop's boats accompanied him.

He was again met by Revello at the gangway, and as he came on board, his men at his back, he said:

"I regret to say, Captain Revello, that my captain demands that you sail with us after the barque, to face her crew as your accusers."

CHAPTER XLIII.

REVELLO'S TERMS.

It was evident that Lieutenant Moxey felt his position keenly.

He was now firmly convinced that Revello was not a pirate, that it was a case of mistaken identity, from the similarity of the two brigs, the buccaneer and the cruiser.

But his stern old commander said it was all nonsense, that the Mexican officer was playing pirate on the high seas under his guise as a cruiser, and when the barque was overtaken it would be found to be so.

"It was but a bluff game he was playing to suggest going after the barque, as he did not think I would do so."

"Return at once on board the brig, Mr. Moxey, and take possession of her with a prize crew, and sail with the sloop when we get a breeze, after the barque."

"When we find her and the man is proven to be a buccaneer, I shall hang him as he suggested and his craft is my prize."

"Egad! I may hang every one of his officers to keep him company," said the irate old commander, who was anxious to become a commodore and believed that the capture of the Ocean Rapier and yard-arming of her captain would gain him the promotion, not to speak of adding

to the golden harvest he each year laid away for a rainy day.

So back to the brig came Lieutenant Moxey with his orders, and they were made known to the commander.

Revello bit his lip and his eyes flashed fire; but he said:

"Lieutenant Moxey, you I do not censure in this matter, and I will say that I will be glad to have you, Captain Dudley and Lieutenant Dean sail on my vessel as my guests in pursuit of the barque."

"You may so arrange your vessels as to have the sloop-of-war lead, and place the Spiteful to starboard, the Battle Bird to port and thus surround me beyond all chance of escape, while you three officers remain on board."

"But this craft is a Mexican man-of-war, flying the flag of my country and I command her, and shall do so until I am proven a pirate, and so I shall allow no prize crew to come on board, no one to hold authority here other than myself."

"But you have heard my orders, Captain Revello," urged Moxey.

"Oh yes, but your orders do not extend to me, for I command here."

"I beg you will consider the matter carefully, sir, for I have one hundred and fifty men in boats alongside."

"I do not care, señor, if you have five hundred, and the sloop, brig and schooner hem me in, I shall not yield one atom of my rights, shall not descend from my dignity, and I mean all that I say."

"Then, Captain Revello, it must come to a question of arms between us."

"As you please, sir; but I shall blow my brig and all on board of her to the heavens, before I will surrender her."

There was no doubting but that Revello meant just what he said, and the three officers saw this, and Lieutenant Dean said quickly:

"Let us see if we cannot compromise this matter, Moxey."

"I am content, only you know I must obey orders."

"Well, as it is Captain Revello's proposition to sail after the barque, for witnesses for or against him, as the case may be, I consider that he will yield if it is proven that he is guilty as charged, so I will go, with Captain Dudley, who I feel will accompany me, to Captain Saul and place the matter before him."

"It is true that we are young men, but we both command our vessels, and the majority will be against him, while as the Battle Bird sighted the vessel in dispute first, and again when seen the second time, if the same vessel, Captain Dudley has the better claim upon her than has Captain Saul, and it must be so placed before him."

"I can but yield, gentlemen, awaiting you here, if Captain Revello will permit," said Lieutenant Moxey pleasantly.

"With pleasure, señor, and if Captain Saul also desires to sail on the Spur he is welcome, so please so express my desire to him, Lieutenant Dean."

Archer Dean promised to do so, and leaving the brig they went in the Spiteful's long-boat to the sloop-of-war.

Captain Saul was a man verging upon three-score years.

He had in earlier years been a whaler captain, was opinionated, and was happy in finding that his crew were terribly afraid of him.

A good sailor he certainly was, and he was as brave as a lion; but he was a tyrant, ambitious to rise still higher, and really hated a man who had not risen as he had, from a cabin-boy on a merchant vessel to the quarter-deck.

"We are going to beard the lion in his den, Dean, and to begin with, old Saul hates me, for I served with him when I was a middy and won his displeasure by some boyish pranks I was guilty of," said Captain Dudley.

"I have heard much of him, but never met him."

"He will refuse our request, and then comes a row."

"If he refuses a request which is certainly most reasonable, I shall have to demand that he does as we wish," was the quiet reply of the young lieutenant.

Captain Dudley looked at him in amazement when he spoke of making a demand upon Captain Saul.

"Are you in earnest?"

"I am."

"He will put us under arrest."

"We shall see."

"It is very evident that you do not know the old tiger."

"Oh, yes; I have heard of him very often."

"Dean?"

"Yes."

"Take my advice and go slow with old Saul."

"I intend to."

"You can never keep to windward of him if you talk of demanding what we wish."

"I shall only open a broadside upon him, Dudley, when all else fails, and I'll wager you that I carry my point."

"What will you wager?"

"Name your sum."

"Call it a handsome sword."

"All right, just the thing; only make it a very superior weapon in blade and mounting."

"Of course, for it is to be my weapon," laughed Captain Dudley.

"We shall see," was the answer, and soon after the boat was hauled from the deck of the sloop-of-war Scorpion.

CHAPTER XLIV.

BEARDING THE LION.

CAPTAIN SAUL saw that there was no attack upon the disputed brig, for he was watching her through his glass:

He saw his lieutenant return, and he noted that the Mexican colors had not been lowered from the peak.

He began to get very angry, in fact mad clean through.

After a long delay he saw a boat put off toward the Scorpion.

It was not the sloop-of-war's boat, he soon discovered, and it was but a short while before it was recognized as the long-boat of the Spiteful.

"How dare that fellow interfere here," he raved, and the officers would have given much to warn those in the boat to put back.

The crew of the Scorpion felt that there was going to be a row.

"Old Whaler Billy will damn the officer, crew, boat, oars and all, see if he don't," said a middy to his messmate, calling Captain Saul by the nickname that the crew gave him of Whaler Billy.

Nearer and nearer came the long-boat, until the old captain hailed it himself and in a voice of thunder:

"Boat ahoy! what boat is that and what do you want aboard my ship?"

"I told you so," muttered Louis Dudley, uneasily, for he had seen the old captain in his tantrums before.

But Archer Dean answered serenely:

"Ahoy the sloop-of-war Scorpion!"

"Did you not hear my hail?" roared the captain.

"Ay, ay, sir, and politely answered.

"This is the long-boat of the American schooner-of-war Spiteful, Lieutenant Archer Dean commanding, and I request, for I am Archer Dean, an interview with Captain William Saul of the sloop-of-war Scorpion."

The officers and crew of the sloop held their breath, while Captain Dudley muttered:

"You are a dead man, Dean, so spend your last minutes in prayer."

There was a silence of some seconds, as though Captain Saul was struck dumb with amazement, and then came in another voice:

"Captain Saul will see Lieutenant Dean, sir."

"He's gone into his cabin to load his pistols to shoot you, Dean."

"I am glad you did not mention me," laughed Dudley.

"Ah, but you are an envoy too, so you will come to see me die."

The two officers were received at the gangway and both found friends on the sloop among their brother sailors; but all united in saying that Captain Saul was in a towering rage.

"Why, he turned white at your reply, Lieutenant Dean, muttered to me to say he would see you, and bolted below," said the officer of the watch.

"Come, Dudley, you accompany me," and with this the two officers descended to the cabin.

Captain Saul was pacing up and down like an angry tiger in his cage.

He glanced up quickly as they entered, and bowed stiffly to the introduction of Archer Dean, while he merely gave Louis Dudley a glance.

"Captain Saul, permit me to explain why we are here, sir."

"That's what I want to know," growled the irate old captain.

In a few words then, still standing, Archer Dean made known the state of affairs, from the chasing of the brig Ocean Rapier out of Mobile Bay, meeting the Sea Spur, a few days before and mistaking her for the pirate, and then what had followed, to the terms of Captain Revello.

The captain listened with more patience than Dudley had expected, or the officers of the sloop who had presented them.

He smiled grimly however and when Dean had said all there was to say, he asked abruptly:

"And this is why you have called upon me, sir?"

"It is, sir."

"And you expect me to make terms with a pirate?"

"I expect you to be convinced that you are dealing with a pirate before you treat him as such, Captain Saul," was the bold response of Archer Dean.

"And you, sir, deem the pirate an honest man?" sneered Captain Saul, turning to Louis Dudley, who replied:

"I did not at first so believe, sir, and was glad to obey your signals to give chase, but I have changed my mind, believing that there is a mistake regarding the vessels."

"And that fool Moxey has also been won over?"

The words were addressed to Dudley, but Dean quickly responded:

"So far from being a fool, sir, Lieutenant Moxey has the good sense to see that a mistake has been made."

The other officers looked at Dean aghast.

His temerity to imply that the old captain had not the sense to see what his lieutenant had, was wonderful.

As for Captain Saul he fairly gasped for breath, and he shouted:

"Do you mean to imply, sir, that Lieutenant Moxey has more judgment in the matter than I have?"

"You understand me, Captain Saul, to say that Lieutenant Moxey, Captain Dudley and myself, having seen the man, his vessel, and knowing the situation thoroughly, are far better able to judge than you are, sir, as you do not give a man in your power a chance to prove that there is a mistake, a man who is a Mexican naval officer, and whose country, at peace with our own, is entitled to all consideration at the hands of American naval officers."

Captain Saul uttered an oath.

It was a safety-valve before he began his reply to the young officer, who thus plainly pointed out to him his duty:

"See here, young officer, I have just this to say:

"I have sent Moxey to seize that craft, and if he does not do so I shall put him in irons for disobedience of orders."

"Now go back to him and deliver my message."

"I am not under your orders, Captain Saul, and shall do nothing of the kind."

"Captain Dudley and I both command vessels in the Gulf, his brig being really the one to have first claim upon the Sea Spur, should she prove to be a pirate, and the majority is against you in your position taken, while your senior lieutenant believes as we do, that the captain of the brig should be brought face to face with the officers and crew of the barque, before he is forced to haul down the Mexican flag, and is treated as a pirate."

"Permit me to urge, Captain Saul, that you reconsider your determination."

The words were uttered politely, but firmly, and the lieutenant looked his superior squarely in the eyes.

The others were amazed, and the conversation, overheard on deck, caused an officer to say:

"Now I see how Dean has won his rank at his age, for he has a pluck that not even old Saul can daunt."

So all felt, and the climax was awaited with interest and awe.

CHAPTER XLV.

A SECRET INFLUENCE.

CAPTAIN SAUL did not recall, in all of his life as an officer, when he had ever been so plainly talked to.

He was proud of being a tyrant, he gloried in inspiring awe, and he allowed no interference or dictation.*

He had made up his mind that the brig was a pirate.

He was a miser, and hence would gain a handsome sum in prize-money by her capture.

* It is a well-known fact that many of the old naval officers were "terrors." The character of Captain Saul is drawn mildly when compared to some of the old commanders.—THE AUTHOR.

Then, too, a vision of her being laden with ingots of gold and silver, treasure untold, and gems of rare value, floated through his mind.

Right or wrong he never retracted, never yielded his point.

If he discovered that he was wrong, in some charge against an officer or seaman, he would never offer an apology, but would do some favor to the injured one to soothe his conscience.

His superiors even dreaded him, and he rejoiced that he was a king aboard ship.

Now, here was a young officer, who fairly told him he had not the sense to see the affair as it was, or the manliness to acknowledge that he might be wrong.

He knew the record of this same young officer.

That he came of one of the best families in America, and which held high influence, but which influence the young sailor had discarded, to work his own way up the ladder of fame and rank.

And Captain Saul knew that he stood in the presence of a hero, for no one knew the record of Archer Dean better than he did.

But, would he permit him to browbeat him?

Oh, no!

He would at once let him see that he knew his duty as he saw it, and would perform it accordingly.

So he said:

"See here, young man, I have been very patient in listening to you, and now I wish you to hear what I have to say."

"Certainly, sir, but please remember that what you have to say may involve our country in a war with Mexico, and when it is known, as it shall be, that you did not yield in the face of facts, the Government will be very apt to consider your case, sir, in an unfavorable light."

This was the most direct shot of all, and Captain Saul again swore vigorously before replying.

Captain Dudley and the junior lieutenant of the Scorpion were plainly nervous and were anxious to have Archer Dean "give up the ship."

The officers on deck were charmed, that "Whaler Billy," the old line battle ship, had met his match in a schooner's commander; but they, of course, felt that victory would be on the side of the heaviest guns.

"Come, Dean, for he will hang Revello in spite of all you can say," muttered Dudley.

But the old warrior had gotten his breath at last and roared out:

"Do you dare threaten me with reporting me to my Government, and what my Government will do at your request?"

"I make no threat, sir, but I do say that I shall report the situation as it is, and Captain Dudley, Lieutenant Moxey and Lieutenant Moore here, under oath, will be forced to verify my statement, that the brig is a Mexican, and you were so informed, while her commander offered you terms to prove his innocence or guilt, which you refused."

"And you dare say that you will report this to my Government?" and the voice of Captain Saul was now hoarse and quivering with passion.

To the surprise of the others Archer Dean stepped nearer to the savage old sailor, and his voice was low and even as he said:

"I shall deem it my duty, Captain Saul, to sail home and make the report as it is, while I will also add to it facts which are in my possession to prove that you acted from a desire for gain in this matter, rather than from a spirit of duty and patriotism.

"Do you wish, Captain Saul, to force me to fight this matter to the end, or will you yield and let the dead past bury its dead?"

The two officers who were with Archer Dean did not catch all of his low-uttered words.

But they were like men struck dumb with amazement.

They expected to see the ancient mariner whip out his sword and run Archer Dean through the body.

Instead they saw him turn to the hue of a corpse.

They feared he was ill and would die in his fury.

But instead he said, and in a changed voice, very low and quivering:

"You are a bold fellow, Dean, to dare talk

to me as you do; but I believe you feel that you are right, and I am wrong, so I am willing to talk it over with you alone.

"Gentlemen, will you leave us alone, Captain Dean and myself?"

"I am not a captain yet, Captain Saul, only a senior lieutenant," was Archer Dean's reply, while a quick flash of triumph came into his eyes.

"By Neptune! but Whaler Billy has struck his colors," muttered Lieutenant Moore, while Captain Dudley mused:

"A frigate has surrendered to a schooner."

"Dean is a wonder."

The two officers, at the request of Captain Saul, bowed and retired, yet with the look of men who felt they were leaving a comrade in the lurch.

As they went on deck they were met by the bevy of officers of the Scorpion, and in a low tone all discussed the courage of Archer Dean, and yet Louis Dudley and Lieutenant Moore were the only ones who expected that the old captain might yield from the position he had taken.

In the mean time, as soon as the others had left the cabin, Captain Saul said, with some show of politeness:

"Sit down, sir."

"Thank you, no, Captain Saul, I prefer to remain standing, especially as our business must require only a minute or two to be settled."

Captain Saul winced.

He felt the shot at his not having been before polite enough to ask his guests to be seated, and the words of the young officer:

"I prefer to remain standing."

"As you please, sir; but please now state your business with me," and Captain Saul was nervous now, not in a furious humor as before had been the case.

CHAPTER XLVI.

A VICTORY.

THERE was a smile upon the handsome, fearless face of Archer Dean, as he heard the words of the old sailor.

"Do you mean, sir, that I am to go over again the full statement of facts, which I supposed you understood so well?"

"You intimated, sir, that you had something more to say to me than you had expressed?"

"On the contrary, Captain Saul, I intimated that I had nothing more to say to you, sir, but facts to place before the Government."

"Ah yes, you threatened to report your version against mine."

"With the statements of Captain Dudley and two of your officers to verify what I had to say."

"The experience of an old officer should stand against the testimony of young ones."

"Age does not always bring experience, Captain Saul, and old men err equally with young men."

"But I desire no controversy, Captain Saul, for you have made up your mind to have your way, so I will merely repeat that I shall make my report of the affair, with certain facts in my possession to substantiate my reasons for believing that you are governed by other motives than a sense of duty."

"To what do you refer?" asked Captain Saul, his manner wholly changed now, his voice subdued.

"I will explain, sir, that when I was left the fortune I possess, from a bachelor uncle, who was a sailor, I came in possession of certain papers which in looking over I found were valuable, in that they were most compromising to several persons, the said uncle included."

"He was a shipmate of yours, Captain Saul, when you both were mates upon a merchant vessel running out of Portland, and his name I bear, that of Archer Dean, for I was named after him."

"My uncle, I may say, was not criminal in his acts, only in so much that he kept concealed certain deeds, from a sense of justice to a friend, who afterward, however, turned out well, and became respected, and honored with high rank in the service of his Government!"

"You are a nephew of Captain Archer Dean?" and Captain Saul was now no longer the tyrant.

"I am, sir."
 "And you were his heir?"
 "Yes, Captain Saul."
 "He left you his money?"
 "With his estate, papers and all else."
 "His papers you have?"
 "Yes, Captain Saul."
 "Where are they?"

"I brought a chest full of them with me, to look over at sea, and they are now on board my schooner."

"And you would make use of certain papers you possess to prove that I go out of my line of duty in this controversy about this brig?"

"If your statement, sir, was taken against that of other officers, sir, I would try and prove that there were reasons existing for believing that you erred in your acts purposely."

"You desire to force me therefore to do as you wish in this matter?"

"Oh no, you can act as you deem best, and I will take the same privilege."

"In other words I must yield, or make you my enemy?"

"Understand me, Captain Saul, that I am doing what I deem my duty in this matter."

"I am neither your enemy or your friend, but that I have not desired to injure you is proven by the fact that no one knows the secret I hold other than we two, for my uncle is dead, as you are aware, and as he attributed your acts in the past to youth and recklessness, rather than intention to do wrong, I am willing to prove my trust in his belief by restoring to you the papers that I hold."

"Heaven bless you, my boy, if you will do this for me," said Captain Saul, and his voice quivered with emotion now.

"I only desire, sir, to do my duty as I see it, and if you will allow me to come on board and visit you, after we have overhauled the barque and proven whether the brig is the Mexican cruiser Sea Spur, or the pirate Ocean Rapier, I will bring you those papers with pleasure."

The words were adroitly put, and Captain Saul answered quickly:

"Certainly, my young friend, come on board, and see me, and I will be glad indeed to look over the papers left you by your good uncle who was my dear friend."

"I will come, sir, and now I must return to the brig, for the situation is somewhat strained, as you know, with Lieutenant Moxey on the vessel in question, and the boats from the sloop and Battie Bird lying upon their oars awaiting your decision, which I am happy to say is to give Captain Revello a chance to prove his innocence of piracy."

Captain Saul had uttered no word to convey an idea of such decision, yet he was glad to have it so put, while he said:

"But if he does not prove his innocence, I will hang him, and seize his vessel."

"Oh, yes, as in duty bound, sir," responded Lieutenant Dean, willing to make that much concession at last.

A moment after he added:

"I thank you, Captain Saul, for your willingness to give a chance to a man whom I believe to be a Mexican officer, to prove that he is guiltless of this charge."

"I will see you, sir, when we have overhauled the barque."

Captain Saul merely hemmed, checking words that he was about to utter.

Then Archer Dean saluted, and, declining an invitation to take a glass of brandy with the captain, he departed from the cabin.

The moment he had gone up the companionway, Captain Saul sprung to the decanter of brandy, dashed off a most generous drink, as though his nerves needed steady ing, and ground out the words between his teeth:

"Beaten, and by a boy!"

"That fellow is the counterpart of his uncle, and he will make his mark in the world."

"Now let me see the shadow of a smile upon the face of any officer or man at my yielding, and I'll make it hot for him, I'll vow."

Then he took a second glass of brandy, pulled his hat down over his eyes and suddenly appeared upon deck, his presence scattering the officers grouped together there, like a covey of birds from a hunter.

The long-boat had left the sloop, and was rowed rapidly away toward the brig, but all on board of it heard the roar of the unchained lion as he shouted at his officers.

CHAPTER XLVII.

UNDER CONVOY.

WHEN Lieutenant Archer Dean came out of the cabin of the sloop-of-war, he saw the officers of the vessel, a score in number, grouped together upon the quarter-deck.

They were discussing the situation, and among them was Captain Louis Dudley, who, with Lieutenant Moore, had left the sloop's commander alone with Archer Dean.

"Well, captain, we must be on our way back," said Archer Dean, while a number of voices asked in chorus the result of the interview.

"The captain will doubtless tell you, gentlemen, what is to be done," said Dean, and he hastily said farewell and with Louis Dudley left the vessel.

There was nothing in his manner or face to indicate what had occurred, whether it was victory for himself or the old commander.

But as they rowed away Captain Dudley said:

"Well, Dean, how did you escape with your life from the lion's den?"

"Very readily, for we had no trouble."

"I suppose your orders are to hang Revello at once?"

"On the contrary, we will not hang him until we overtake the barque and see if he is proven a pirate."

"Do you mean that old Whaler Billy yielded?"

"He became convinced that the best thing to do was to overhaul the brig."

"In Heaven's name, how did you convince him?" asked the amazed Dudley.

"Oh, by reasoning, of course."

"Well, I'll give you the sword, Archer, for you have fairly won it, and it is worth its loss to me to know that you tamed the tiger; but how you did it will remain a mystery to all who know old Whaler Billy."

"Oh, he's not such a bad fellow, after all."

"Well, you don't know him, that is all, Dean."

"But won't Moxey be surprised?"

"Will he?"

"Well, he will, for he knows the old man, and was too smart to go back to the sloop to explain matters."

"I'll bet you that old Whaler Billy is cursing the keel off the sloop now, and the men are in terror of their lives."

"How you escaped with your life, is a mystery to me."

"Oh, you are all too hard on the old man, for I found him very easy to manage."

"That is what amazes me," and Captain Dudley was really amazed at the success of his young brother officer and friend.

At last the long-boat ran alongside of the brig.

Captain Revello and Lieutenant Moxey were upon the quarter-deck, but the former did not show the slightest uneasiness of manner, or anxiety to know the result.

As the men could have heard all said in the boat, Lieutenant Dean had said nothing to Louis Dudley, explanatory of what had occurred between himself and the ancient mariner.

Now he said:

"Well, Captain Revello, I am glad to say we had an interview with Captain Saul, and he agrees to your terms."

As he spoke, Lieutenant Moxey cried:

"Bravo! I never suspected it could be arranged."

"But about the men, Lieutenant Dean?"

"You are to return with the boats to the sloop, Captain Dudley will do likewise with his crew, and I will go to my vessel."

"Of course, if you remain on board with Captain Revello it will be as his guest, and not in the place of a guard."

"As my guests, gentlemen, I will be most happy to have you all," said Captain Revello, and he added:

"As I understand it, Lieutenant Dean, we are to sail in chase of the barque which was met and robbed?"

"Yes, sir."

"If the skipper recognizes me as the pirate,

and my officers, vessel and crew, then I am to surrender to Captain Saul?"

"Yes, sir, that is the way it is to be arranged."

"But, if I am not proven to be this pirate of the Ocean Rapier, then I am to be allowed to go my way?"

"It is so, Senor Captain Revello."

"Well, senors, I shall only demand in return a salute to my flag, from the sloop, brig and—well, Lieutenant Dean, I can hardly say the schooner, for you have been my friend throughout, and I appreciate it."

"Now, senors, I observe just the shadow of a breeze coming, and we will be ready to sail within a very short while."

The three officers now decided that Captain Revello should go upon his vessel alone, and they took their departure after Lieutenant Dean had spoken of the manner of sailing.

"The Scorpion is to lead, senor, and you are to follow in her wake, while Captain Dudley sails upon your starboard quarter and I upon your port."

"We will press on under full sail and endeavor to overhaul the English barque with all dispatch."

"I understand, senor," and Captain Revello bowed.

"I will be on hand, Dean, to hang Captain Revello, if he is found to be this terrible pirate, or to salute his flag when it is proven we have wronged him," Captain Dudley remarked.

Then Lieutenant Moxey took his leave, and soon after Louis Dudley and Lieutenant Dean followed his example.

There was a ripple now seen on the waters, and coming toward them, so all were rejoiced that the dead calm would be over and their vessels could glide on after the barque, which it was hoped would be overhauled before very long.

The Sea Spur was the first to catch the light breeze, and she moved at once into her position, to be convoyed by the three vessels-of-war.

Captain Revello had shown no anxiety as to his situation, and placed his vessel under shortened sail to prevent running away from the sloop, which was not a very fleet sailer.

The Battle Bird soon got the wind and dropped into position, while the schooner Spiteful took her situation also as a convoy.

The boats of the sloop reached their vessel in good time, and Archer Dean was very glad to see the Scorpion square away to sail after the barque, for he had feared that Captain Saul might become so enraged after all as to retract all he had said.

But the sloop held on her way, the Sea Spur following in her wake and with the brig and schooner upon either beam, being thus convoyed on her course in pursuit of the barque upon whose captain so much depended.

CHAPTER XLVIII.

SIGHTED.

THE English barque was a fine vessel and carried a valuable cargo.

She had been sighted early in the morning by an armed brig which gave chase, and she spread all canvas in an effort to escape.

But the pursuer gained steadily and fired a shot for the barque to lay to.

This the captain allowed to go unheeded and the next shot, from a pivot bow chaser of large caliber cut the foremast in twain some six feet above the decks, and the wreck carried away the bowsprit as well.

Of course the barque at once fell a prey to the brig, which ran alongside soon after, boarded and took from her hold certain valuable portions of her cargo, provisions and spars and canvas that would come useful.

But a richer prize was found in the cabin in the shape of a strong box of gold, which one of the barque's crew turning traitor, whispered to the brig's captain of its presence on board.

The traitor sailed away in the brig, when the presence of the pirate was seen by the sloop-of-war Scorpion and the Battle Bird, which were temporarily cruising together.

The two cruisers saw the pirate fly, at their approach, and upon speaking the barque learned of all that had occurred on board.

Then they gave chase, and both the sloop

and the brig were very fleet vessels, so held their own with the pirate far on into the night, when a mist swept over the seas and they lost sight of her.

But just before dawn a brig was sighted again, and that it was other than the pirate no one had the slightest idea.

As the wind died out, and left the two cruisers becalmed upon the waters, they signaled with lanterns to attack in their boats, the brig lying at almost equal distance between them.

Such was the history of the finding and chase of the brig which it was claimed was one and the same as the pirate.

Of course the terms offered by Captain Revello to sail after the barque, and see if the commander of the robbed vessel would recognize him as the buccaneer, was a fair one, and so, having gotten Captain Saul at last to consent and not hang Revello first, and try him after, the three cruisers went in pursuit of the English craft, with the brig in their midst, and completely environed.

All day long they sailed well together, closely grouped, the sloop-of-war leading.

The wind was blowing a ten-knot pace, and the men on each craft watched their respective vessels with the admiration of sailors.

It was seen that the Scorpion was crowded with every stitch of canvas that would draw, and was doing her very best, sailing swiftly and evenly.

The Battle Bird had a little canvas to spare, which she did not spread, wishing to keep in position astern of the sloop-of-war.

So it was with the schooner Spiteful, for she too could have spread more sail, and did not, so as to hold her position off the lee quarter of the sloop.

It was evident to all that had these two vessels spread their canvas entire, they would have walked ahead of the sloop-of-war in fine style.

This fact the people of the Scorpion realized, and it caused old Captain Saul to fret and fume savagely, for it had never been so that he had met the match of his fine vessel before.

And how was it with the brig that had the Mexican colors at her peak?

Her behavior was a source of humiliation to the crews of the three cruisers, for to hold her in check her captain had not set his topsails, and had single-reefed his lower sails.

Had he put up the canvas of the Battle Bird he would have run by that vessel with ease, or dropped the Spiteful rapidly astern either.

Here was a strange craft, very quietly showing that she could distance the Americans if so she willed, and the crack Americans, too, of the navy.

But the captains gauged the canvas to hold their positions, and thus the day passed.

When night came on it began to blow, but night-lights were set up on all the four vessels, and they were held in sight during the darkness.

The wind was fair for them, and they drove swiftly along until dawn, when no other sail was in sight.

But toward noon came the cry from the Sea Spur's top:

"Sail, ho!"

The stranger had sighted the sail even before the sloop, which was nearly a mile ahead.

"Ay, ay! it is the barque," said Captain Revello, who went aloft with his glass, and he signaled to the sloop:

"Sail, dead ahead."

"It is the barque."

Had he wished to get the sloop's men cursing, he was successful, for old Captain Saul came on deck and swore at officers and men as being blind, and fools as well, although they had nothing to do with the sighting of the vessel ahead.

"That bloody pirate has better eyes than any of you, and is doing your work for you," he roared.

Captain Dudley also had something to say to his lookout aloft for his negligence in not having seen the barque, and Lieutenant Archer Dean called out from the deck:

"Ho, aloft there!"

"Do you wish a pair of spectacles?"

But Lawton Leslie said:

"Lieutenant Dean, do you notice that ball up at the very top of the brig's mainmast?"

"Yes, it is the topsail."

"Look again, sir, and you will see that it is a man, or rather a boy, who has been hauled there to sweep the sea, for the height of the brig's masts is so great that it puts him above the lookout in the foretop of the sloop even."

"You are right, Leslie, and it is that handsome cabin-boy of Captain Revello's, as my glass now reveals," said Archer Dean.

"Yes, sir, and the vessel ahead is the barque, as I saw just now when aloft."

"Then Revello will soon triumph or be hanged, that is certain," was the lieutenant's reply.

CHAPTER XLIX.

FACE TO FACE.

WHATEVER he might feel, Captain Revello's face showed no anxiety for the result of the meeting with the captain and crew of the English barque.

The latter vessel had rigged a jury mast and bowsprit, after considerable delay, and was going on her voyage once more, when her lookout startled the captain with the cry repeated again and again:

"Sail ho!"

"Whereaway?" called out Captain Windsor from the deck.

"Dead astern, sir."

"What do you make of them?"

After a short silence the answer came:

"An armed fleet, sir, of four vessels."

"We have little to fear then, unless they are French."

"One is a sloop-of-war, sir, with a brig dead astern, another brig off the stern starboard quarter and a schooner off the stern port quarter.

"The sloop and the brig to starboard, sir, look like the two American cruisers that drove the pirate off."

"Ah! they may have captured him."

"I believe they have, sir, for the brig dead astern of the sloop-of-war looks like the pirate."

"I only hope so, and then we will get back what he robbed us of, for these Americans are whole-souled men, and would not see me lose what they had retaken," said Captain Windsor.

A couple of hours after the force of armed vessels were coming up close astern of the barque, which had been signaled from the sloop-of-war to heave to.

This signal Captain Windsor promptly obeyed, and as he now recognized, not only his defenders, in the Scorpion and Battle Bird, but the pirate in the brig, he was happy.

But the mate attracted his attention to the fact that the brig which they said was the buccaneer, carried the Mexican flag at her peak, and the Stars and Stripes at her fore. They could not understand this, if the brig was a prize.

But Captain Revello had hoisted the American flag to the fore out of compliment for the company he was sailing in.

So the barque lay to and the sloop led in column now, with the Mexican brig astern of her, then the Battle Bird, and the Spiteful bringing up the rear.

When the sloop came to, the other vessels ranged so as to have the Mexican in the center of a triangle, so that escape was perfectly impossible.

The wind was blowing light now, the sea was smooth, and at a signal from the sloop, boats put off from the armed vessels and were headed for the barque, Captain Windsor in surprise wondering what it all meant.

In the boat from the sloop went Captain Saul, a marine officer and a squad of men, and twelve oarsmen under a middy and coxswain.

Then came the boats from the brig Battle Bird and schooner Spiteful, with their commander's in them.

The boat from the Sea Spur came with Captain Revello, Lieutenant Moxey and Ivan in the stern, and the youth was acting as coxswain and held the tiller-ropes.

There were eight oarsmen, and in the bows of the cutter was the Stars and Stripes, the Mexican flag floating over the stern.

The men were in the Mexican uniform, and upon the collars of their shirts were a spur and anchor crossed, and worked in red and blue.

Upon the blades of the oars was the same

design, while upon Captain Revello's cap and collar were the spur and anchor in gold and silver.

The Mexican was dressed in his full uniform, gorgeous in the extreme, and was as serene as the sea in a calm.

The boats reached the barque's side nearly together, the sloop's barge going first to the gangway as entitled by the rank of Captain Saul.

The old sailor was received cordially by Captain Windsor, and returned it by simply saying:

"We have come aboard to see whether you are going to help us to hang a pirate or apologize to an honorable man for a mistake made."

Captain Dudley's boat landed next, and as he had been the one to board the barque before, Captain Windsor received him very graciously, wondering just what the bluff old captain meant by his words.

Captain Saul bowed very stiffly to Louis Dudley, who returned it with a polite salute.

Then came Archer Dean.

Captain Dudley presented the English captain, and Archer Dean then saluted Captain Saul who said:

"Now we will know who is right after all this trouble, Lieutenant Dean."

"Any amount of trouble is better, Captain Saul, than to wrong an innocent man," was the sharp retort of the schooner's commander, and Captain Saul's face flushed angrily though he said nothing.

The fourth boat now ran alongside and Captain Windsor was stepping to the gangway, when Captain Saul called out:

"It is for you, sir, to say who that man is whom you are to welcome!"

Captain Windsor, still in the dark, bowed in silence.

First came on board Ivan, in his handsome uniform, and carrying a silk flag of blue upon which was embroidered in gold a spur.

Next came Captain Rudolph Revello, and following him Lieutenant Moxey.

Captain Windsor met the Mexican as he stepped upon his deck, and extending his hand said:

"Welcome, sir."

No one spoke, there was no introduction, and all eyes were turned upon the two men who stood face to face, the Mexican undergoing the test of life or death to him.

The English captain looked toward Captain Dudley for an explanation, then toward Captain Saul.

But neither uttered a word and Captain Revello was the first to speak.

His voice was low, and his manners perfectly at ease.

"Pardon me, senor; but it seems that your vessel was overhauled and robbed by a pirate?"

"It is the case, sir."

"Will you say if you see the pirate vessel among those four yonder?"

"I do, sir, it lies yonder—the brig flying the Mexican flag," was the response of the English captain.

CHAPTER L.

THE ORDEAL.

THE response of the English commander of the barque, that he recognized the pirate vessel, in the brig flying the Mexican colors, brought a decided exclamation of delight from the lips of Captain Saul.

To Captain Dudley and Lieutenant Dean the reply was expected.

The Mexican smiled and said:

"Pray take a good look at the brig, captain, and note if she is like the pirate in every particular."

Captain Windsor did so, and after several minutes said:

"Well, I should say it was the pirate brig, though there are certain changes I note now."

"Will you name them?"

"She had a somewhat different rig, I think, for her top-masts were not so tall as those of the brig yonder, nor her bowsprit so long."

"Then the pirate brig's sails had certain patches I do not see now on the canvas of that vessel."

Captain Saul uttered a low-voiced imprecation, for Captain Dudley now said:

"I, too, note the differences you refer to, Captain Windsor."

"You, sir, are not the one to decide this matter," savagely said Captain Saul.

"I am not the one either to allow an injustice, when I can prevent it," was the sharp retort of the Battle Bird's commander.

"A conspiracy, a devilish conspiracy to rob me of my pirate," growled Captain Saul, while Revello continued:

"Now, Senor Captain, pray tell me if I am the man who robbed your vessel upon the high seas several days ago?"

"You, sir?"

"Yes; am I the man?"

"Oh, no, indeed, sir!"

"You are sure?"

"Why, the pirate wore a long beard, and was a totally different looking man."

"You must make no mistake."

"I do not, sir."

"Did you see this youth on board your vessel that day?"

"I did not, sir," and Captain Windsor gazed at Ivan admiringly.

"And as my men are called to pass before you, pray say if you saw any one of them among the pirate crew?"

The boat's crew were called and passed before the English captain, who eyed them closely.

"Do you recognize any face among them, sir?"

"I do not, sir."

"Now, senor, may I ask if you will acknowledge that there may have been a mistake?" and Revello turned courteously to Captain Saul who thundered forth:

"No, sir, not yet do I acknowledge a mistake, for you may not have been the boarding officer, nor one of your boat's crew paraded here have been the ones who were upon the vessel."

"I am content, sir, to parade my vessel and crew fully before this English captain, and if you are not satisfied then, I shall not longer submit to what, upon your part, appears to be mere spite or venom against me, though why I cannot understand," and Revello spoke in a very decided manner now.

Captain Saul would have replied, but Lieutenant Dean quickly said:

"Pardon me, Captain Saul, but Captain Revello has submitted to the ordeal he proposed, and it should end this unfortunate controversy; but as he seems willing to do more, I will make the request that, as the sea is calm, he run his vessel alongside the barque and let the severest test be made, as his crew will then have to face the men of this craft, as the pirates did then, and his brig lay in the position of the buccaneer while committing his robberies."

"I am content, sir, and I thank you for putting me to the severer ordeal," said Captain Revello.

"I now see the situation, gentlemen, and though I may be mistaken, I will say that I still have a belief that yonder brig is the pirate that robbed me," Captain Windsor remarked.

"The truth is, senor, that in the night while chasing the pirate, which I admit is my Double, these two commanders lost him for an hour or more."

"Then they sighted me, prepared to attack, and but for the coming of Lieutenant Dean here in his vessel, I would have been hanged long ago as a buccaneer, when I am Captain Rudolph Revello of the Mexican Navy."

"Now, senors, I am ready for the greater test," and stepping to the gangway, Captain Revello hailed:

"Ho, the Sea Spur!"

"Ay, ay, senor," came in the voice of Senor Estal.

"Get under way and run alongside this barque."

"Ay, ay, sir."

"Muster every man on board for inspection, and have the ship ready to receive visitors!"

"Ay, ay, senor," came reply and the men of the Sea Spur quickly sprung to their posts and soon after, most skillfully handled, the Mexican vessel ran alongside of the barque.

Grapnels were thrown and then came with a roar from Captain Saul:

"Not a man of you board that craft!"

"Now, Sir Englishman, muster your crew here to note that vessel!"

Captain Windsor gave the order and the English crew were mustered accordingly,

and stood gazing upon the men of the Sea Spur who stood quietly gazing up at them.

"Now, sir, call your officers!" shouted Captain Saul.

Revello did so, and they stood grouped together.

"Have any of these men been seen by you before, Sir Englishman?" asked Captain Saul.

"I do not recognize one of them, sir."

"Now go with me over that craft and see if you can find any of your stolen goods on board."

With a bound Captain Revello confronted the angry old sailor, while he hissed forth:

"Pardon, senor, but I fly the Mexican flag, and if you are not content with the ordeal through which I voluntarily pass to show your mistake, I will defend my vessel from such an indignity as you propose."

"Defend your vessel you will dare resist me?" yelled Captain Saul now beside himself with rage.

"You have heard my words, sir, and I am not a man to make idle threats."

"This captain and his crew can decide whether my vessel and men are the ones who robbed his barque."

"If he says we are not, then I know how to defend my vessel and my flag from further insult."

"Now, senor, you know just what to expect," and Revello dropped his hand upon his sword-hilt, while his face showed the determined man at bay.

CHAPTER LI.

THE TRIUMPH.

CAPTAIN SAUL was in no humor to be browbeaten by a man whom he was endeavoring to prove to be a pirate, and at the bold stand taken by the Mexican he yelled out:

"We shall see, Sir Mexican, we shall see, if you can resist my vessel."

Turning quickly toward where the sloop lay, he called out in stentorian tones that all heard:

"Ho, the Scorpion!"

"Ay, ay, sir!"

"Stand down alongside yonder brig and board her, cutlass in hand!"

But no one heard whether the officer in command of the Scorpion answered or not, as Lieutenant Dean suddenly confronted the furious old captain.

Archer Dean's manner was perfectly calm, but his face was set in a determined way, and his voice was very distinct as he spoke:

"Captain Saul, I must ask, sir, that you live up to your acceptance of Captain Revello's terms."

"Sir!" shouted the old sailor.

"It was agreed, sir, that you should overhaul the barque, and see if Captain Revello was recognized by the captain of that vessel."

"This has been done, and not a man on board this barque will, I believe, under oath, assert that the brig is the pirate who robbed them, or the captain and crew the men they saw upon the buccaneer."

"If they were the guilty ones, would not there be some recognition?"

"See, here is a boy who, if seen once, would surely be recognized—

"Captain Windsor, did you see this youth upon the pirate vessel?"

He referred to Ivan, who boldly faced the Englishman.

"I did not, sir."

"Did you, men of the barque, see this youth on the buccaneer vessel?"

"No, sir!" came in a loud chorus from the English crew.

"And there stands a negro, one who surely would be remembered if seen on the pirate vessel."

"Was that negro seen by you, Captain Windsor?"

"No, sir."

"Nor by any of your men?"

"I saw a negro, sir, on the pirate; but I only got a look at him through the port, and they is all alike in the face, sir," said the boatswain of the barque.

"Then you could not swear that this was the negro?"

"Indeed, I could not, sir."

"Now, Captain Saul, you have heard the testimony of the witnesses appealed to, and Captain Revello is not a man, either, to be mistaken for any one else."

"You lost this pirate in the night, and ran

across Captain Revello's ship, and the English commander of the barque says that the topmasts and bowsprit of the Sea Spur are taller and much longer than those on the pirate, while there were torn and patched sails on the outlaw and not on this craft."

"Again, the pirate was just able to keep ahead of your sloop and the Battle Bird, while the Sea Spur has shown that she can drop both vessels out of sight, even my schooner having met far more than her match in sailing, in the Mexican brig."

"Now, Captain Saul, with such testimony in favor of Captain Revello, I for one will say that he has cleared himself of the ugly charge put upon him, and which a pirate craft, the Double of his own beautiful vessel, has caused him to suffer under."

"And I say the same, understanding the situation now as I do, sir," said Captain Windsor.

"It is my opinion, most thoroughly," Captain Louis Dudley ventured.

But Lieutenant Moxey did not speak, for he cared not for a broadside from his commander.

The sloop-of-war was just then bearing up to run aboard the Mexican brig, and Captain Revello sprung upon the bulwarks of his vessel and shouted in Spanish:

"Ho! men, to your guns, and await orders!"

"Ho! the sloop! Keep off, or I will fire into you!"

The last command was in English, and Captain Saul was about to reply, when again Archer Dean confronted him and said sternly:

"Order your vessel off, sir, and to lay to, or, by Heaven, I will—"

The surprised Dudley heard no more, but all did hear Captain Saul's loud command:

"Keep off with the Scorpion and lay to for further orders!"

The Scorpion bore away just in time, and with a face as white as death Captain Saul said:

"Now, see here, Sir Mexican, I shall expect you to sail to Vera Cruz with me and prove your claim to being a Mexican cruiser, and then will I make all reparation in my power."

"And I refuse, sir, as I did to allow my vessel to be searched as a sea-thief," was the hot retort of Revello.

"Then, sir, I will not be restrained by young upstarts from what I deem my duty, as you shall see," said Captain Saul, and he was turning again to hail the Scorpion, when Archer Dean said in a tone that all now heard:

"Captain Revello, demand that Captain Saul carry you to an American port, where you can plead your own case before our Government, and exhibit papers which I can furnish you with as a proof that an officer of our navy has made a mistake which he refuses to rectify."

Captain Saul did not hail the sloop, but turned upon Archer Dean.

He glared upon him an instant, and all saw the look, and the cool return look of the young lieutenant.

Whatever others read in that look, Captain Saul interpreted it to be a warning he dared not disregard.

The others looked on in silence, and then, had a bombshell dropped upon the deck from the sloop, they could not have been more amazed at it, than they were in the change of Captain Saul's manner.

"See here, Lieutenant Dean," he began, harshly, though his voice gradually softened as he felt the spell of the piercing eyes upon him.

"It seems that you defend this man as you do, because you must know that he is not what I claim him to be."

"I would not take oath that he is not, sir, but we have no proof that he is a pirate, and so I demand only justice for him."

"Well, as you and the others are against me in my opinion, I say no more, so let him go, and the future will prove who is right," and Captain Saul turned on his heel, and walking to the gangway, descended to his boat without another word.

CHAPTER LII.

A LEAF FROM THE PAST.

WHEN Captain Saul left the deck of the English barque, he seemed utterly indifferent to the presence of all about him.

But upon reaching his boat, before giving the order to return to the sloop-of-war, he called out:

"Captain Dean, may I expect the pleasure of seeing you aboard the Scorpion at your convenience?"

"Lieutenant Dean will give himself the honor of calling upon Captain Saul within a very short while," was the reply, and the boat pulled away.

Then Captain Revello turned to the young commander of the Spiteful and said:

"Senor, I have to thank you for being my friend in this matter, and I feel that I owe it to you that I have not been hanged by that very savage old gentleman."

"To convince you now that there is no doubt as to my being the one I represent myself, if you gentlemen will dine with me this evening on board the Sea Spur, I will show you papers which a cruiser's commander alone can hold possession of."

"I thank you for myself, Captain Revello, but must decline, as you heard Captain Saul's request, and more, I have a cruise to make which I have been delayed in going upon, so must decline, though I hope to have the pleasure of meeting you at another time."

As there was indication of a storm brewing, the others also declined the invitation of the Mexican, and they parted upon the deck of the barque, Captain Windsor thanking the Americans for the trouble taken in his behalf.

"Where will you rendezvous a month hence, Dean?" asked Captain Dudley, as he clasped his friend's hand.

"At Mobile, and I hope to see you there, for I shall refit in that port."

"Then at Mobile we meet," was the answer, as the young captain rowed to his vessel.

"Now, Lieutenant Moxey, as I go to the sloop, will you accompany me?" asked Archer Dean.

"With pleasure, Lieutenant Dean, for Captain Saul actually forgot my existence, and he was in no humor for me to remind him of it when he left."

"But, what is your *modus operandi* of handling the old gentleman, pray tell me?" laughingly said Moxey.

Farewells were then said, and as the schooner's boat left the barque, the Sea Spur and the English vessel swung apart, the latter to go on her way, the former to still remain near the cruisers for some reason.

Upon his arrival on board the sloop-of-war, Archer Dean was received with the full honors of a captain, while Lieutenant Moore escorted him at once to the cabin, where Captain Saul awaited him.

The old captain looked pale and nervous and his manner was somewhat embarrassed as he greeted the young officer.

"Be seated, my dear young friend, and have dinner with me, won't you?"

"Thank you, no, Captain Saul, for I just declined an invitation to dine with the Mexican captain, and another with Captain Dudley; but I was coming on board of your vessel to bring you the papers I promised you should have."

"Thanks; yes, I thank you. I had half feared you had forgotten them."

"Oh, no, sir, they were too valuable for that, I assure you."

"And you have them then with you?"

"Oh, yes, and I am glad in the end you were merciful to the Mexican."

"That man is a pirate, sir," said the old captain.

"Granted even that he is, sir, but we had no proof of it."

"Well, wait and see if the charges against him are not some day proven."

Archer Dean made no reply, but took from his pocket a bundle of papers.

He unfolded them carefully, and then it was seen that a number of them were time-worn and stained.

One by one he placed them upon the table before him, and each one the old captain eagerly seized and rapidly scanned.

His face flushed and paled as he did so, and his eyes studiously avoided those of Archer Dean.

At last the papers were all in the hands of Captain Saul, who said with trembling voice: "God bless you, my son."

Archer Dean's face softened quickly.

It had been stern before—merciless; but the expression changed, and he said earnestly:

"Captain Saul, this secret came to me from the dead."

"I had no right to it, and yet it was mine, an inheritance."

"It told me that a man, now of high rank, one respected and admired, whatever his shortcomings and peculiarities were, a man who had deservedly won fame and position in early life, had been a mutineer, seizing a vessel and turning her into a slaver."

"He had been captured by his boyhood friend, my uncle, a man whose life he had saved in the past, and the old friendship was so great that he was allowed to escape, and more: was helped to a different life, thereby saving him from himself."

"That man I have always heard was merciless to any one else who erred, who did not live up to the strict discipline he vowed his crew should be under."

"He forgot his own sin, and was determined to punish others for it."

"Now, sir, I restore to you these papers that tell the whole story, and which I am glad to give back to you."

"Believe me, I did not intend to use them, for they were not mine; but the threat to do so served its purpose, and I kept you from doing that which I fear would have caused no end of worry to our Government."

"Here, Captain Saul, is your secret, and I forget it with the return of these papers to you, I pledge you my word and honor as an officer and a gentleman."

As Archer Dean spoke, he held out his hand to the old captain, who wrung it earnestly, and then the young officer turned away with the words ringing in his ears:

"Archer Dean, you are the counterpart of your uncle, the same noble nature and true hero."

"God bless you, and if ever you need a friend, come to old Whaler Billy, shipmate, and I mean every word of it."

Thus these two parted.

CHAPTER LIII.

IN PORT.

WHEN Archer Dean left the cabin of the sloop-of-war, he was warmly greeted by the officers of the vessel, among whom he was indeed a hero.

He chatted with them a few minutes, and then returned on board his own pretty vessel.

The English barque was miles away, standing once more on her course after her adventure, and the brig Battle Bird was under a press of canvas heading in an opposite direction.

The sloop lay to as she had been doing, and the schooner was an eighth of a mile to leeward of her, also lying to.

The Mexican brig was two leagues distant, heading straight out into the Gulf and with every rod of canvas set that would draw.

She was fairly flying, as the men on the Scorpion said.

When he returned to his schooner, Archer Dean was met by Lawton Leslie, who said with a smile:

"From all accounts, sir, you gained a great victory."

"You mean over the old captain?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, I am glad I was able to convince him that it was but right to let the brig go."

"She is going, too, for I never saw anything that could sail like her."

"Her going makes me think of the schooner's run away from other vessels; but Captain Revello came on board before he left, sir."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, sir, and he begged your acceptance of a few dozens of Mexican wine, while he left a package to be handed to you."

"I am sorry of this, though, of course, we will enjoy his wine."

"The package is on the table, sir."

Archer Dean then gave orders to get under way, and surprised Lawton Leslie by saying:

"Lay her course for Vera Cruz, Mr. Leslie."

When he entered the cabin, he saw a long package there which he proceeded to unwrap.

It revealed a rosewood case, and upon opening it a sword and belt were seen.

The sword was one of rare and exquisite workmanship, the steel being of the finest, and the hilt of solid gold set with precious stones.

Upon a hastily written card was the following:

"Accept the accompanying sword and belt with the best wishes of the officers and men of the Mexican cruiser Sea Spur."

"This is indeed beautiful," said Dean, and he called Lawton Leslie into the cabin and showed it to him.

"I do not see how I can accept this, for I have done nothing to deserve it," he said.

"Haven't you?"

"Well, you saved their necks from the noose, and that is enough to make them grateful, only I don't see how Revello got hold of this splendid sword unless he is a pirate," laughed Lawton Leslie.

"Well, I am going to Vera Cruz to satisfy myself all about the man, and I shall see him there, if he goes to that port as he said it was his intention to do."

The Spiteful held on her way under easy sail and after a fair run, one night entered the port of Vera Cruz.

She ran in to an anchorage and in the morning Archer Dean went ashore accompanied by Lawton Leslie, who knew the town well.

It was the desire of the young commander of the Spiteful to verify the statement of Revello that he was a naval officer.

Of course, Lawton Leslie had recognized him as the commander of a Mexican cruiser, but then there had been so many stories afloat that he was committing acts of lawlessness, Archer Dean desired to know whether the Government really sanctioned the Sea Spur as a cruiser, or if she had become an outcast vessel.

Inquiry at once showed that there was a cruiser in the Mexican service known as the Sea Spur and that she was commanded by Rudolph Revello.

The same Rudolph Revello had been a wild fellow in his younger days, and many a daring deed was laid to him which some hoped he had not been guilty of.

His courage and skill had caused him to rise rapidly, until he became lieutenant, commanding a small cruiser, and then he was charged with acts of lawlessness, which though not proven caused him to have his vessel taken away from him.

He at once disappeared from Mexico, but returned some two years after in a beautiful vessel which had been built in the United States.

This vessel was armed and manned fully, and was presented to the Mexican Government by Revello, who was promptly reinstated in the navy and made a captain.

He at once started upon a cruise, and some year or so afterward lost his vessel, in a fight with a Spanish cruiser double his size, to which he would not strike his colors, preferring to run his craft ashore, which he did.

He had lost half his crew, killed before he wrecked his vessel, and many more men drowned after she struck.

But Revello was praised for his pluck, though his enemies prevented the Junta from giving him another vessel, many of the old rumors of his lawlessness being revived against him once more.

Again he disappeared, and after a year returned with the Sea Spur, a most beautiful craft, which he had had built at his own expense, in Baltimore, and armed and fitted out without the cost of a *peso* to the Government.

Of course he was again commissioned, and though rumors came in that Revello was leading a double life upon the seas, no proof could ever be found against him, and thus he held his position, rendering excellent service to the Government in many ways.

He had disguised his vessel once as a merchantman, been boarded by lagoon buccaneers, and had captured their craft and taken their retreat.

Many stories were told of his deeds of heroism, until at last those who had maligned him became his friends, as no proof could be found of his lawless acts.

This is what Archer Dean discovered regarding the commander of the Sea Spur, and the young American was no nearer the solu-

tion of the case, as to whether he was guilty, or his vessel had a Double that was a buccaneer, than he was before.

After mature consideration Lieutenant Dean leaned toward the belief that Captain Revello's beautiful vessel really had a Double, and it was her lawless deeds upon the high seas that were laid at the door of the Sea Spur's commander.

The Spiteful remained for a week in port at Vera Cruz, but the Sea Spur had not put in an appearance, and there was no one there who could tell when she was expected.

So it was that Lieutenant Dean decided to depart, and sail for Mobile, where he wished to refit his vessel.

CHAPTER LIV.

A LOVE SECRET.

WHEN Captain Revello had sailed away from the scene upon the Gulf, where his career had so nearly been brought to an end by Captain Saul, he headed his vessel straight out for deep water, seemingly not caring to remain nearer the coast, or in the vicinity of the cruisers he had just left.

Until the vessels he had left disappeared beneath the horizon he held on his way, and then, the moment the lookout aloft, according to his orders, reported, "No sail in sight," he changed his course and gave instructions to Lieutenant Estal to make a certain small port upon the coast of Mexico.

In good trim the Sea Spur ran into the little land-locked harbor, the existence of which no vessel passing along the coast a league offshore would have suspected.

There were only a few houses there, but back in the country were the haciendas of large cattle-owners, rancheros who lived like princes upon their vast estates, with large wealth at their command and servants by the score.

Among the richest of these was Don Ricardo Castile, a Spanish noble who had married years before the daughter of a ranchero.

The wife had died leaving the Don with one daughter, whom he had taken to Spain to be educated, so that she had returned a brilliant belle who had enslaved hundreds of hearts in the capital of her father's native land.

Marcelite Castile was as lovely in character as she was beautiful in face and form, and yet her heart seemed never willing to become captive to any suitor that crossed her path.

But one day from the high hill upon which the grand old hacienda was situated, and which commanded a view of the distant sea, Don Ricardo and his daughter saw two vessels-of-war maneuvering for battle.

One was flying the Spanish flag, the other the Mexican colors, and though a Spaniard the sympathy of the Don was with the land of his adoption.

As for Marcelite Castile she was heart, body and soul a Mexican.

"Oh, father! that large Spanish sloop-of-war will destroy the little brig," she cried.

"Yes, the Mexican captain is a fool to risk a battle with her, and even now he could escape if he would," responded the Don.

With their glasses they watched the two vessels drawing nearer and nearer to each other, until at last the Don said:

"Come, my child, we will ride to the wooded cliff and watch the result."

Horses were ordered and away they sped, father and daughter, with a number of mounted servants following as an escort.

The wooded cliff commanded a fine view of the sea, and just as they reached there they saw the two vessels, not a league off, the plucky little sloop bearing directly down upon her large foe.

Then the battle was begun by the fire from the Spaniard which missed its mark, while a response of a broadside from the Mexican made every shot tell.

Quickly the Mexican got her other broadside to bear upon the Spaniard before she had received a wound, and this one was worse than the first.

Hot and fast then waged the battle, the nimble brig seeming to bear a charmed life, while she worsted her large enemy at every broadside.

Nearer and nearer they drew to each other until at last the Spaniard's mainmast was cut down then the bowsprit was shot away,

and the Mexican kept up his fatal fire until at last the Spanish ensign was hauled down and the foe was beaten.

The Don was wild with enthusiasm, and as he kept his yacht in the little port, rode at once there, boarded, and accompanied by his daughter sailed out to where the two vessels lay repairing damages.

It was a pitiful scene for the eyes of a young girl, when she boarded the Mexican vessel with her father, for the decks were strewn with dead and wounded men, guns were dismounted, sails hung in tatters, the bulwarks were riddled and the decks seamed by shot.

But the crew were hard at work repairing damages as quickly as possible, and there was a look of pride upon their faces at the victory they had won against a foe so powerful.

There came toward the Don and his daughter a hand'some man with one arm in a sling, and a hankerchief bound about his head.

But his manner was courtly and he spoke the purest Spanish as he invited the Don and his daughter to enter his cabin.

"This is no scene for a fair lady's eyes, senorita; but I appreciate the kindness of your father and yourself in coming off to my vessel and offering me the hospitalities of your home," said the gallant young captain, who had introduced himself as Rudolph Revello of the Mexican cruiser Sea Spur.

As both vessels were sadly in need of repairs, Captain Revello decided to accept the Don's invitation to put into the little harbor to remain for a few days, and so they were headed inshore and brought to anchor.

The next day the captain dined at the fine old home of Don Ricardo Castile, and both father and daughter were charmed with the gallant hero of the unequal battle.

"I called you a fool, Senor Captain, for risking a battle with so powerful a foe, but you proved that you knew just what you were about," said the Don, and he added:

"I humbly ask pardon for my mistake."

Captain Revello had received two wounds, one in the arm, and one in the head, though neither were serious; in fact he regarded them as nothing whatever.

His vessel had been somewhat crippled, and his crew had greatly suffered, so that he decided to go to Vera Cruz and refit, and carry his prize with him.

"I am glad to hear this, senor, for we will see you there, for business calls me to Vera Cruz in a few days, and my daughter is going to visit her aunt who dwells there."

Rudolph Revello seemed very glad indeed to hear that the Don and his daughter expected to visit Vera Cruz, and he at once suggested that they go by sea, accepting passage upon his vessel.

This it was at last decided to do, and thus it was upon the run to Very Cruz that Marcelite Castile was thrown constantly with the handsome captain of the Sea Spur, and for the first time in her life began to discover that she possessed a heart, and could love as other maidens did.

But it was after her arrival in Very Cruz that the wild career of the dashing sailor was made known to her, and then came to her many a heart-ache which told her how dearly she loved Rudolph Revello.

CHAPTER LV.

THE SEA SPUR'S RETURN.

Of course the Don learned who it was that had been his guest, that he was a man known to be reckless and one who had led a desperate life.

Duels were set down against him by the score, and he was said to be a gambler, and a man who held no tie of womanly love sacred.

Well born, well educated he certainly was, and brave as a lion, while he was a splendid sailor.

He was rich, or at least always had money, as his building his own vessels showed.

He was a hero certainly, and was indifferent to what was said about him, unless he could trace an ugly rumor to some one man and then the odds were that he got his revenge in nine cases out of ten.

Don Ricardo had been a very gay man himself, and he had a fellow-sympathy for the handsome sailor, while he was a worshiper of a hero, and Rudolph Revello was his beau ideal of one.

So it was that few persons had the temerity to go a second time to Don Ricardo with a report against Revello, and the warning that he had better not let him visit the beautiful Marcelite, known to be the heiress to a vast fortune from her father, and already rich in her own right from her mother, while she was looked upon as the handsomest and loveliest of maidens. Marcelite was sought after by hundreds of gallant young Mexicans, and old ones too for that matter.

When therefore she appeared to be more friendly with Revello than with any one else, of course tongues became busy painting the sea-captain in colors the blackest.

But with neither the Don or his daughter had these reports any effect, or rather they did not cause Revello to be banished from the presence of the lovely girl.

Of course Marcelite had many a heart-ache at hearing the rumors of Revello's wild doings, but when she saw his utter indifference to his accusers, and heard his explanation of certain acts, she was happy again.

As for Rudolph Revello he had fallen desperately in love with the beautiful Mexican girl.

Not a soul in Mexico knew of his marrying Lucille Lomax, and that he was then wedded and the father of a boy.

No one in Mexico knew of this secret Island Retreat where the Sea Spur was wont to go and rendezvous.

And that there was really a double life led by the Mexican captain not a soul had thus far been able to prove.

His crew had been questioned, bribed and threatened time and again; but not one had ever expressed any idea that their captain was other than he represented himself.

His officers, too, were as true as steel, and never a word could they be made to utter against their commander.

There was one thing, however, about the officers of the Sea Spur which caused comment, and that was the fact that they were unknown men, unknown at least in the service, who had been appointed by Revello himself, who secured their commissions for them.

Of all the officers on the vessel there was not one who had been in the Government service before he was brought forward by Revello.

Seldom was it that the Sea Spur was in port, and little did she ever cost the Government, though there was no craft in the navy of Mexico that rendered greater service than did Revello's vessel.

He reported directly to the Junta, was given a roving commission, and was answerable only to the power that commissioned him.

With this explanation of the mysterious cruiser known as the Sea Spur, I will now go on to follow the vessel after her leaving the American men-of-war, when her career had been so nearly brought to an end by Captain Saul's determination to hang Revello, and try him afterward.

The port he had ordered Officer Estal to head for was the little harbor near the hacienda of Don Ricardo Castile.

Riding along the shores, followed by a peon servant, one afternoon, Marcelite had seen the vessel standing rapidly in toward the harbor.

She had learned to know the Sea Spur well, and so sent the peon to the hacienda to order a horse brought to the shore for Captain Revello, who she knew would be their guest.

The vessel ran rapidly in, and as she dropped anchor Don Ricardo joined his daughter upon the shore, having returned with the peon.

Revello rowed ashore at once, and was cordially received by both father and daughter, when he mounted the horse brought for him, and returned with them to the hacienda.

It was that night, while the captain and Marcelite sat in an arbor together, the perfume of jessamines around them, and the moonlight bathing all in its silvery light, that the sailor asked the maiden to appoint an early day when she would become his bride.

Long they talked it over, and at last the Don was called into consultation and a day was named.

It was decided that the marriage should take place at the Don's home in the City of

Mexico, in just one month from that date, and it was with this assurance, after a week's stay at the hacienda, that Revello set sail for Vera Cruz.

This delay at the little harbor had caused the Sea Spur to be so far behind the Spiteful, which had awaited her arrival in the harbor of Vera Cruz, it will be remembered.

The order had been given by Lieutenant Dean to get under way at eight bells that night, when the lights of a vessel-of-war were seen running past the San Juan de Ulloa and heading up for an anchorage.

Lawton Leslie was officer of the watch at the time, and soon sent word into the cabin to Archer Dean that a vessel was coming in, which he felt very sure was the Sea Spur.

At once Lieutenant Dean came on deck, and turning his glass upon the coming vessel, said quickly:

"Yes, Leslie, that is the Sea Spur.

"We will not sail to-night."

The vessel swept on up to an anchorage, and rounding to, dropped anchor astern of the American schooner-of-war.

The keen eyes of the Mexican captain had searched the harbor closely as he sailed in, and he very quickly sighted the Spiteful.

"Ah! there is my old friend, the Spiteful, in port.

"What can have brought her here, Estal?" he said.

"To watch you, señor, of course."

"How so, and why?"

"Captain Dean was your friend, you said?"

"Yes, and now would not be my foe."

"No, but he wishes to know whether you were really Captain Revello of the Mexican cruiser Sea Spur, or the buccaneer, Red Rapier."

"I believe you are right, Estal."

"I am sure I am, señor."

"Well, he will find that I am the captain of the Sea Spur, and that he did right to keep me from being hanged as a buccaneer."

"Yes, señor."

"Run the brig close in under the stern of the schooner, and drop anchor.

"Then I will go aboard the Spiteful, and pay my respects to her gallant commander."

The brig was run up to her anchorage and soon after a boat was about to put off from her side, when one was seen coming straight toward the Sea Spur.

"Boat ahoy!" hailed Senor Estal, who was on deck.

"Ahoy the Sea Spur!"

"Ay, ay, what boat is that?"

"A boat from the American schooner Spiteful, with Lieutenant Dean, who desires to board and visit Captain Revello," came the answer.

"Ay, ay, come alongside!"

A moment after and Archer Dean stepped upon the deck of the Sea Spur once more.

At the gangway he was met by Captain Revello who said cordially as he grasped his hand:

"My dear Senor Dean, I am rejoiced to meet you, and in Vera Cruz, where I can prove my appreciation of your kindness.

"I recognized your vessel, though not expecting to meet you here, and was just ordering a boat to board you when yours came within hail.

"Come into my cabin and we will have a long chat together."

Archer Dean was pleased with his cordial reception by the Mexican captain, and glad to see that he had come into port and never was none other than what he had represented himself to be.

He went into the cabin of the brig, and until long after midnight the two sat talking together over their cigars and wine.

When at last Archer Dean took his leave he said to himself as he returned to his vessel:

"That man has been cruelly maligned, for indeed he is a noble fellow."

CHAPTER LVI.

AN EAVESDROPPER.

Was it Fate that led the Sea Spur into the harbor of Vera Cruz before the American schooner had set sail?

Was it Fate that had caused Archer Dean to sail to Vera Cruz to discover what he could about the commander of the Sea Spur?

It would seem that Fate often directs our

steps, for certain it was that Rudolph Revello appeared to be led blindly by it to meet what was in store for him.

He had welcomed Archer Dean on board his vessel and the two had had a long talk together.

The heart of the Mexican had warmed toward the American who had saved him from the yard-arm, and he felt that he was his best friend and urged him to stay longer in the port.

He had become confidential, and told him of his engagement to the beautiful Señorita Marcelite, and that soon she was to become his bride, when he would give up his life on the sea and make his home in the United States.

A great deal did the Mexican tell his American friend, and it was very late before they parted.

But at last they did so, and Lieutenant Dean returned to his vessel, promising to remain one day longer in port to meet his friend.

Hardly had Archer Dean entered his own cabin when an officer came to inform him that a person wished to see him who had boarded the schooner by swimming off from the shore.

"Admit him," was the command, and then there entered the cabin none other than Ivan De Sol.

He was dripping wet, and his face was very pale.

"I am here, Lieutenant Archer Dean," he said, "to tell you that on your vessel in Mobile Bay, it was I who informed you of the presence there of the buccaneer brig Ocean Rapier."

"I am now here to tell you a story of wrong of the cruellest kind."

"I am to tell you that I am not a boy, but a woman, the wife of Revello, a wife who has heard to-night in his own cabin his story of how he intends to well another."

"I took advantage of a resemblance to a youth on Revello's island retreat to go on his vessel as cabin-boy, and I now tell you that I wish you to run down this man, Rudolph Revello."

"He is none other than Bertrando the Buccaneer, his vessel none other than the Red Rapier."

"I am an American, and he is the slayer of my father, and I have longed for revenge."

"I will have it now, for I will to-morrow get orders sending Revello to sea, and you can lie in wait for him, capture and hang him."

"Now, Lieutenant Dean, you know my story, you know his, and I ask you if you will aid me in the work of revenge?"

"Gladly; yes, most gladly will I do so."

"Get orders for him to go to sea to-morrow, and I will lie in wait for him, and the pirate shall be my prize," was the response of Archer Dean.

After some further conversation between them, Ivan, or as the reader now knows her to be, Lucille Revello, swam back to the brig, drew herself up by the rope she had lowered herself into the sea by, and gained her stateroom unseen.

The next day the schooner-of-war, Spiteful, put to sea, and soon after orders came sending the Sea Spur in chase of a suspicious vessel seen off the coast, and thus far the plot of Lucille and Archer Dean was successful.

CHAPTER LVII.

THE CABIN-BOY.

It was a bold thing for a woman to do, as the reader now recognizes the pretended Ivan De Sol to be, to go on board the brig Sea Spur as cabin-boy, and plot for the ruin of the chief, who was her husband.

Lucille Lomax had never loved Rudolph Revello, the Mexican sailor.

He had fascinated her, and her father and mother had seemed to regard him highly, so that she was thrown much with him.

But Lucille's love was another's, though that other had never told her of his devotion to her.

She, however, knew this, for love needs no words to portray its meaning to willing ears.

That other was Archer Dean, and he had been ordered to sea himself one day, or the words would have been spoken.

Finding that Lucille declined his love,

Rudolph Revello began to plot to ruin her, and in this he was successful, for pretending that harm would befall her parents, he urged that but her becoming his wife alone would save them, hinting that her father was his ally in some acts of lawlessness, and so playing upon her fears until in her anxiety she consented to a secret marriage, to find out when it was too late that she had wedded a man who was living a double life, for, though honored by his Government, secretly he was a Sea Rover.

Pleading his idolatrous love for her as his excuse for winning her as he did, devoted to her in every act, and influenced by her for good, Lucille could not but admire the man and be drawn toward him with some regard.

Thus the years passed by, and in the love of her little boy she was content, if not happy, for her rover husband had vowed that he would return her to her home and her parents when Reginald reached the age of five years.

The reader has seen that return home and how Lucille found her mother dead, her father a madman.

It has been seen that her father, his brain wrecked, fell by the hand of Rudolph Revello, and that after even that, the sorrowing wife departed to sea once more with her lawless husband.

But Lucille went for revenge.

His killing her father as he did caused her to hate the man now who was her husband, and in her heart she vowed to avenge her dead parents and the wrong done her.

She vowed to betray the secret that she had been the wife of a free rover, that her son was the child of a buccaneer.

So it was that she went with him to sea once more, and yet tried to see if he would not even then change his career and become all she asked of him for her son's sake.

But she felt that he was deceiving her, that he intended to play some bold game of deviltry when he left her at the island retreat.

What that was, a lucky accident for her enabled her to find out.

Her striking resemblance to Ivan De Sol in face and form, caused her to plot boldly.

She took the youth into her secret, and the negress Linda as well.

She also took little Reginald into her confidence, and finding that she could trust Topaz, the deformed negro, she told him what she intended to do.

This was, at the last moment, when the brig was prepared to put to sea, to cut off her wealth of hair, don the uniform of Ivan, and go with Topaz aboard the boat as cabin-boy.

Ivan was to remain upon the island and impersonate her, wearing, as she was wont to do, a sun-hat tied down beneath her chin, which enabled him to hide that the long hair was not there.

Dressed as Lucille did, and keeping aloof from the people as much as possible, the cheat could be carried on at the island without fear of discovery.

But could the fraud be practiced aboard ship?

Lucille believed that it could.

Captain Revello had seldom seen the boy, Ivan, and then had marked his striking resemblance to his wife.

Topaz would help her all in his power, and in her uniform she believed she could successfully play her bold game to the end.

That she did so has been seen, and she played it in triumph for the stake of revenge.

It was Lucille who had sailed the *punta* across Mobile Bay by night, in disguise, going on board the schooner-of-war, Spiteful, and telling of the presence of the Ocean Rapier near Spanish Fort.

She had made the run boldly, for she was a plucky and skillful sailor, and she had hoped that her husband and his vessel would be taken.

She had watched him bury his treasure, and noted how he had tried to deceive her, and this told her he was false to her.

She returned to her home with only Linda knowing of her absence, and then had come Pedro to tell her to board the brig with her son, and she had been forced to obey.

She had seen the daring and skill of her husband extricate his vessel from her peril, and though she had from him a vow not to fire upon or rob a vessel of her country, she

had lost all reason when her boy was wounded, and allowed the cruisers to be fired upon.

When she became cabin-boy of the brig, to her joy her husband did not recognize the cheat.

From her state-room she had heard all that took place between Revello and Lieutenant Archer Dean, and she knew that her husband intended uniting to him by false ties a beautiful, trusting girl.

In the American schooner, commanded by her old lover, laid her hope of preventing this mock marriage with Marcelite Castile, and capturing the brig, so, being a fearless and tireless swimmer, she decided to swim to the schooner and have an interview with her young commander.

This she did, and the result was that Archer Dean entered into her plot to place the brig in his hands.

Having arranged her plot with Archer Dean, Marcelite boldly returned on board the brig as she had come, by swimming, gained her state-room unseen, and throwing herself down upon her bed, as soon as she had put on dry clothing, she did not sleep, but lay awake for hours, maturing her plot to destroy Rudolph Revello, the Red Rapier Rover.

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE PLOT TO AVENGE.

The morning dawned without a thought in the mind of Rudolph Revello that all was not going well with him.

He had his crew under thorough discipline, and the League they belonged to prevented any betrayal on their part of a plot, even should they know of his intention.

They would not feel that he intended to desert the Lady of Luck, even if he did marry a Mexican heiress and beauty, regarding the latter as fair game, and her money as aiding to enrich them.

But Revello did not intend to allow his crew, if he could prevent it, to know of his marriage to Marcelite Castile.

He would send the brig to sea under Estal, and when she returned after a cruise of months, he would have left Mexico with the woman he had deceived, have her money in his keeping, along with the treasure he had hidden away, and no one would ever know where he was, for he would see to it that he was supposed to have lost his life.

What Estal did with the vessel he did not care, or what became of his wife and child.

Such was his infamous and daring plan, and he awoke to see no shadow between himself and the sun.

He was ready to act and he would lay his plans accordingly.

He had to go ashore and report his arrival to the Government, and then he would be free to act, and would arrange to get his vessel to sea without him.

But the supposed Ivan was plotting too, and so asked the captain if he could go ashore and see the sights of Vera Cruz.

"Go in the boat with me, lad," was the answer.

But Ivan was not ready, had some work to do, and would ask Lieutenant Estal to set him ashore afterward.

So Captain Revello moved away in his boat, and then Ivan began to carry out his plot.

He first took the Mexican's keys from their hiding place, opened a drawer and looked over some papers until he came to one that pleased him.

He regarded this for a long while, then sat down and with a quill pen began to write.

Having completed his task he put what he had written into his pocket and was soon after set on shore.

He went at once to the offices of the Junta and had little difficulty in finding his captain.

"A letter came for you, señor, and the man who brought it said it was important," said the supposed boy.

Revello broke the seal of the letter which Ivan had written and read a few lines.

It was a forged urgent appeal from Marcelite for him to come to her at once on the brig.

"Who brought this, Ivan?"

"A fishing boat, señor, and the skipper said it was urgent."

"Yes, it will cause me to put to sea this afternoon, as soon as I see two of the members of the Junta."

"Go aboard the brig and say to Lieutenant Estal to have the brig ready to sail soon as I come on board."

"Yes, señor."

"And then go on board the schooner-of-war Spiteful, and say to Captain Dean that important orders send me at once to sea."

"I forgot, señor, but Captain Dean sent word by me that he had to go at once to sea, as there was a suspicious craft reported in the offing."

"Then you have seen him?"

"Yes, sir."

"All right, it is just as well under the circumstances of my going to sea," and Revello went back to his talk with the Junta, while Ivan returned on board the brig, but not until he had sent a letter to Lieutenant Dean on the Spiteful.

The result of this communication was that the schooner at once got up her anchor and sailed out to sea.

The skies were overcast, and the air was murky and heavy.

The sun was hidden under a mist, and it looked as though a storm was brewing, and in that latitude a storm is something to avoid if possible.

But, bold men of the sea have no fear of the elements, and the schooner went out upon blue water with no dread of a foe she could not master.

Later in the afternoon the commander of the brig came on board.

"Señor Estal, are you ready to sail?" he asked quickly.

"Yes, captain."

"Then stand out to sea at once."

"Do you note, señor, that the elements are threatening a tornado?"

"I did not notice the fact, but now you attract my attention to it, there is a very black look about the sea and skies."

"Would it not be well, señor, to delay sailing for a day?"

"No, there is a suspicious craft outside I wish to have a look at, and we can run right down the coast to the harbor I often visit, if the storm threatens to break with too great force."

"As you please, captain," answered Antoine Estal, accepting the words of his captain, of a suspicious vessel being outside, as the right excuse for going to sea, though he would have been glad to remain in port for a few days' frolic ashore if it could be done.

So it was that the schooner went to sea four hours after the Spiteful, and once she had gained an offing all saw that they were going to have a very black night of it.

Captain Revello had remained in the cabin until he felt the brig pitching her nose into the seas outside and then he went on deck.

The wind was not steady, but blew in flaws, and it came from half a dozen different directions, it seemed, within a sail of a league.

The sea was tumbling about in large green breakers, and the air was heavy, the skies hanging low, while a bluish mist hung upon all.

Revello was anxious to reach the little port near the home of the Don as soon as possible, but it looked as though the tempest would burst with fury by night, and there was yet leagues before the brig before she could drop anchor in the haven he sought.

"Run at once for the port I spoke of, Estal, and crowd the brig with sail, for we are going to have a very black night of it," he said.

"We could put back into Vera Cruz much more readily, señor."

"No, I will go on."

"And the suspicious craft, señor?"

"Never mind her now, but run to the little harbor," was the stern response.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE TORNADO.

THE schooner-of-war Spiteful had gone out to sea in the face of the brewing tempest.

The note sent to Archer Dean by Ivan had told him the brig would sail, and the little port for which she would head, with an idea of the plot to lead Captain Revello to go there.

So the schooner headed for the secluded harbor, intending to come upon the brig, speak her and then attack and capture her.

If the tempest came in ahead of their meeting, then Archer Dean intended to run for the harbor himself and await there the coming of the brig, when he would boldly attack her there.

Such was the plan, and the Spiteful was headed for the harbor.

But the tempest she had to face was far beyond all expectations of her young commander and her crew.

It came too upon the little vessel when she was in sight of the port she sought to make, headed her off and struck her with a fury that was irresistible.

In all their lives upon salt water not a man of the schooner's crew had ever seen a storm to equal the one that struck them then.

The schooner met the tornado boldly, but her foremast was torn away, her mainmast followed, and then, a perfect wreck, she was driven along before the howling winds and waves, wholly at their mercy.

The guns were washed loose and stove through the bulwarks into the sea, while two scores of gallant men were swept away to die in the mad waters.

It was a wild, appalling sight, and the schooner began to leak, and all felt that she must go down before many hours.

Some of the crew seized the life-boat and escaped, only to perish after leaving the vessel.

With the dawn the tempest ended, and the remainder of the brave crew had to take to the boats, for the schooner was settling fast.

The daring young commander had proven himself a hero of heroes through the long hours of the fatal tornado, and had cheered his men all in his power.

Though the seas still ran high, they had to trust themselves to the two boats, and were soon adrift upon the wild waste of waters.

The boats became separated, and one was picked up by a New York bound vessel, and the crew saved.

Days after, the boat in which was Archer Dean and a score of men was sighted by a large ship bound for China, and out of Boston.

Her captain kindly cared for the shipwrecked mariners, but there was nothing for them to do but take the long voyage on to China in the vessel that had saved them from death.

Thus a year passed before Archer Dean and his men again put foot in their native land, after their desperate battle with death in the Gulf of Mexico.

And the vessel which was the cause of the Spiteful going to sea in the teeth of a gale?

The Sea Spur put to sea with an excuse to the Junta, from her captain, that a suspicious-looking vessel was reported outside, and he went out to overhaul her.

In his own mind he could not understand why he had been so suddenly called to the Castile Ranch.

He had left the Don's hacienda but a few days before, and then all had been arranged for Marcelite and the Don to meet him in the City of Mexico, when he would make her his wife, as she supposed.

Why, then, this summons to her side?

Had his enemies triumphed in the end, and caused her to feel that she must break with him her engagement?

It was certain that Revello was very anxious about the letter he had received, and which he had no suspicion in his mind of its being a forgery.

So he went to her, and the brig was crowded with canvas, to endeavor to reach the Don's harbor before the tempest should strike her.

But in vain the hope, for she was not half her run to the longed-for haven, when the tornado swept down upon her, and she was even more quickly left a wreck than was the schooner.

And many of her crew had gone to death upon the waves, while the wounds the vessel had received in her combats, began to tell against her now, and water poured in in torrents.

In dismay Revello at last gave the order to man the boats, when suddenly a sailor appeared before him.

"Señor I have a story to tell you," he said.

"This is no time for stories, man, but work," sternly said Revello.

"But I would say, señor, that you have a Jonah on board, that there stands the one who is the cause of your reverses and misfortunes."

"It is that boy, for he swam to the American schooner last night and had an interview with her captain."

"He wrote the letter that sent you to sea to-day, that the schooner might capture you."

"I was his ally, señor, but to tell you all, and I intended to do so when we sighted the schooner."

"The boy is a traitor, Señor Captain, and we owe all of our misfortunes to him."

Such was the story which Pedro, the Indian sailor now told, and the face of Revello grew black with rage as he turned his burning eyes upon the one he supposed was a boy.

"Speak! is this true that this man tells?"

"It is," was the calm reply.

"Then you have sealed your fate, Ivan De Sol, for we will leave in the boats, the storm is over, and we will survive, while you shall perish, yes, go down with the brig which you tried to betray into the hands of the Americans."

"Ho, men, to the boats and leave this devil to die, to go down to the bottom in the wreck!" and the voice of the Mexican Rover rung with savage earnestness.

Ivan De Sol clasped his hands but uttered no word, no cry.

He saw the men enter the boats, beheld them row away in the gathering gloom and he was left alone.

"Go! go on, you pirate fiends, for you go to your death, while I will live."

"Yes, your boats will sink, while the wreck shall float!"

And away in the darkness, tossed upon the tempestuous sea, drove the wreck of the brig, the sole being upon her deck the woman who had played her game for revenge so boldly, played it to the bitter end.

CHAPTER LX.

CONCLUSION.

WERE the words of the woman prophetic? Did Lucille, the deserted wife of the Rover of the Gulf, see what would be the fate of the crew of the brig, when they left the vessel, and realize that the wreck would float and she be saved?

It would seem so, for the wreck of the brig did not go down as it had threatened, but floated on and on, until at last it went ashore upon an island that was inhabited.

And kind hands aided the boy, as all supposed Lucille to be, to the shore, and helped her on her way until she was at last able to seek the island retreat, where the idol of her life was, her boy.

She told of the wreck of the brig and loss of all on board, and away from the island she sailed one night with Linda, her boy, and Ivan, who so well had played the part, playing it to the end, for the islanders had believed that it was Ivan De Sol, the cabin-boy, who had returned.

And there they preferred to remain, not caring to leave the island, though Lucille had said she would send a vessel for them.

And in the little craft the brave woman made her way to New Orleans, where Ivan left them, for he said that he had work to accomplish.

No news had come of the missing boats, no word that they had landed at any port, or had been picked up at sea.

Thus years went by, and a veil seemed to have fallen upon the lives of Lucille, the pirate's wife, her little son and Linda.

Then one day a vessel put into the little harbor of Red Cliffs, on the shores of Mobile Bay, and a lot of workmen were set ashore.

They began to discharge a cargo of lumber, and soon half a hundred men were busy erecting the grand old mansion, the ruins of which can still be traced crossing the summit of Red Cliffs, and about which hang so many weird stories, strange and mysterious.

At last the fine house was completed, and then it was richly furnished.

People wondered who it was that was to occupy this grand mansion, for not a soul seemed to know.

The workmen could not, or would not tell

anything, and all they knew was that their wages were promptly paid, and they had been told to build the mansion upon the spot where once had stood the Lomax cottage, and which had been burned down one night of storm, struck by lightning, it was said, and destroyed, for no one could tell the origin of the fire.

At last the dwellers came to this new home, and they were found to be a lady in black and her son, a youth just in his teens.

They were accompanied by an old negress, and these three seemed alone to know from whence they had come and who they really were.

There were servants in plenty, but these had been sent over from New Orleans or Mobile, and they knew nothing of their employers.

And thus, in the quiet of the spot where had passed her girlhood days, dwelt Lucille, the Rover's wife, and with her was her brave, handsome son, Reginald, not a soul ever suspecting that he was the son of Revello, the commander of the buccaneer brig Red Rapier.

THE END.

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